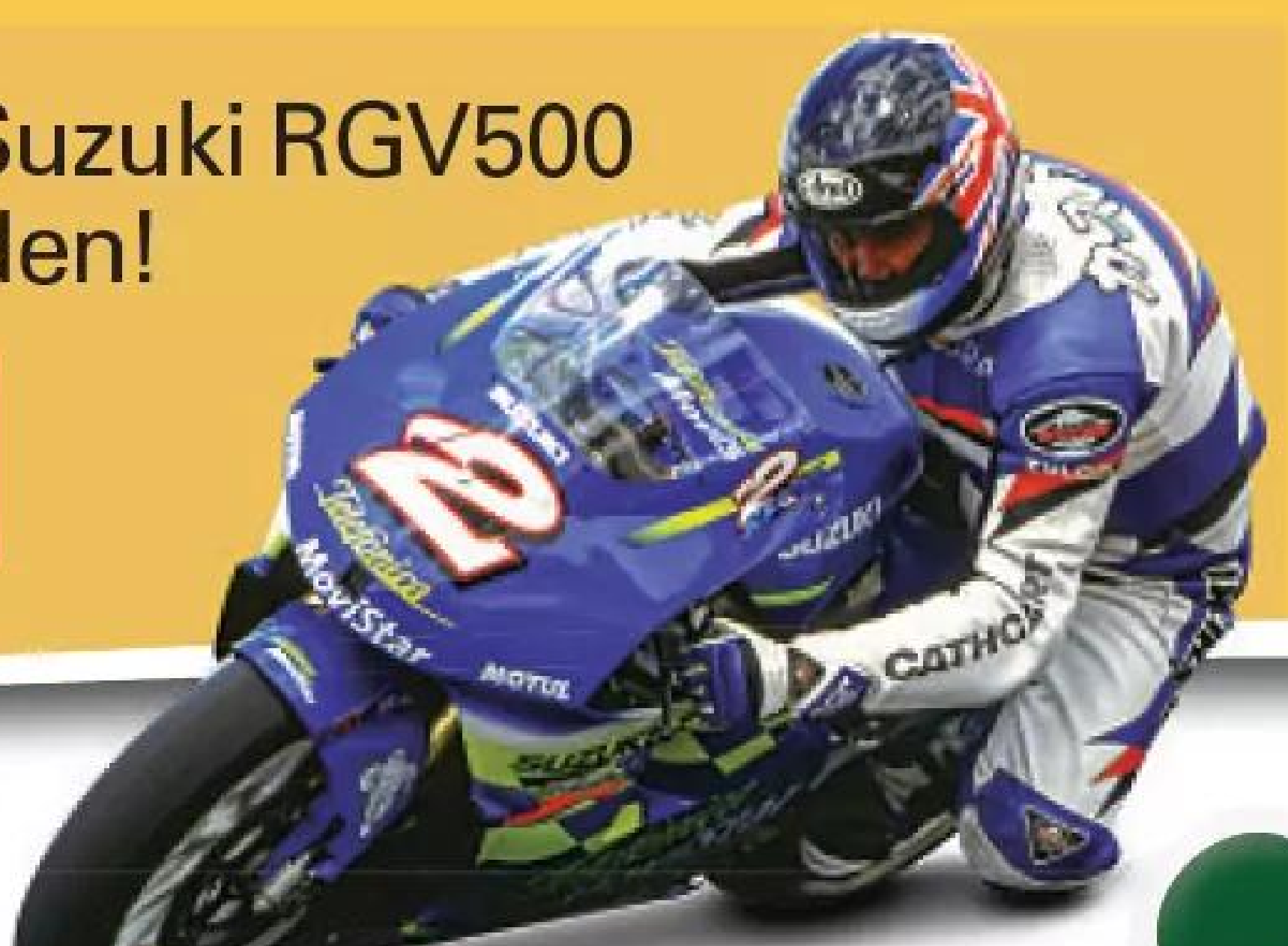
KING KENNY II Junior's Suzuki RGV500 XR89 ridden!



BARRY SHEENE 50 YEARS SINCE FIRST 500CC WIN

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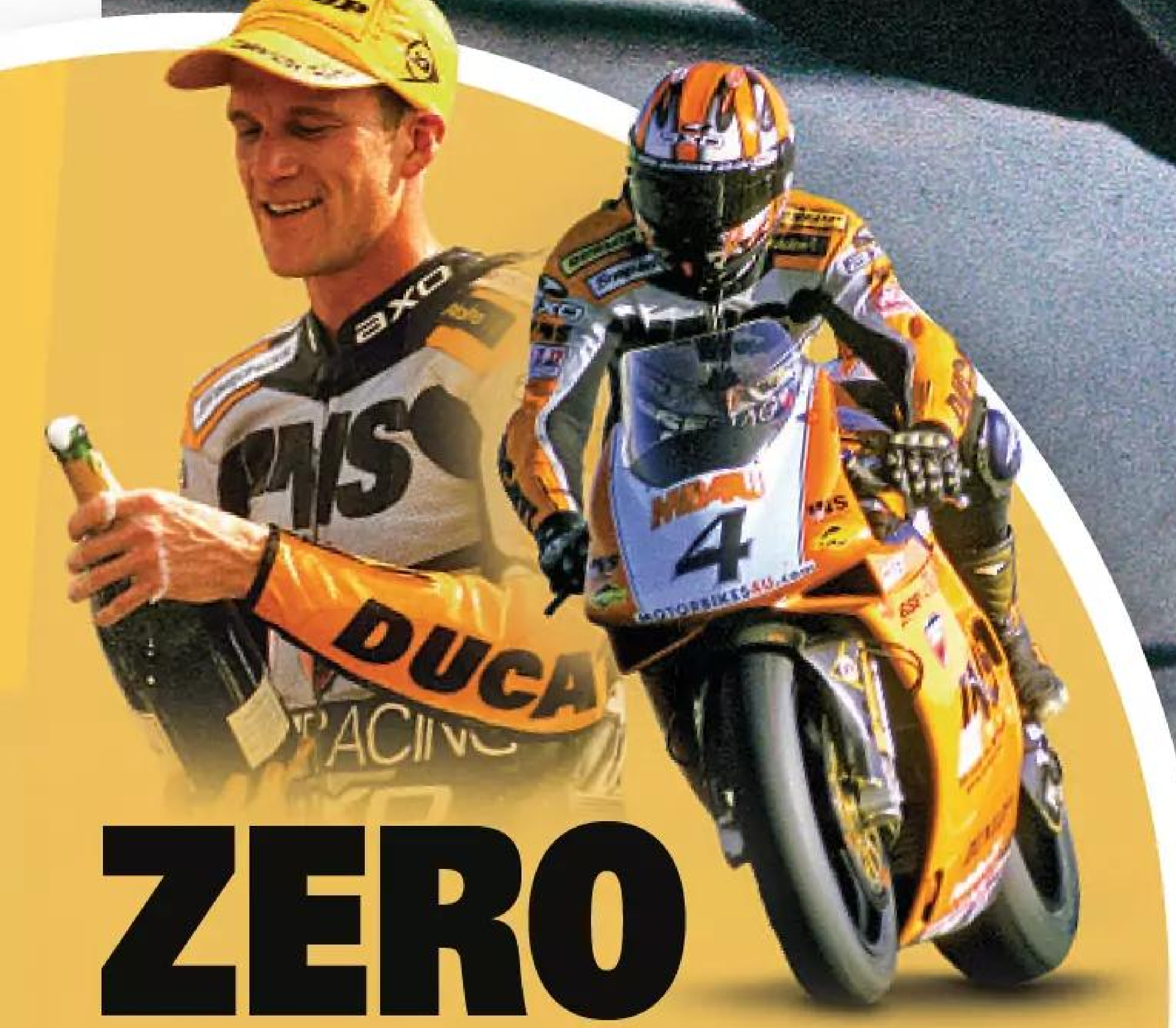
BACK IN THE DAY: YOUR PICTURES!

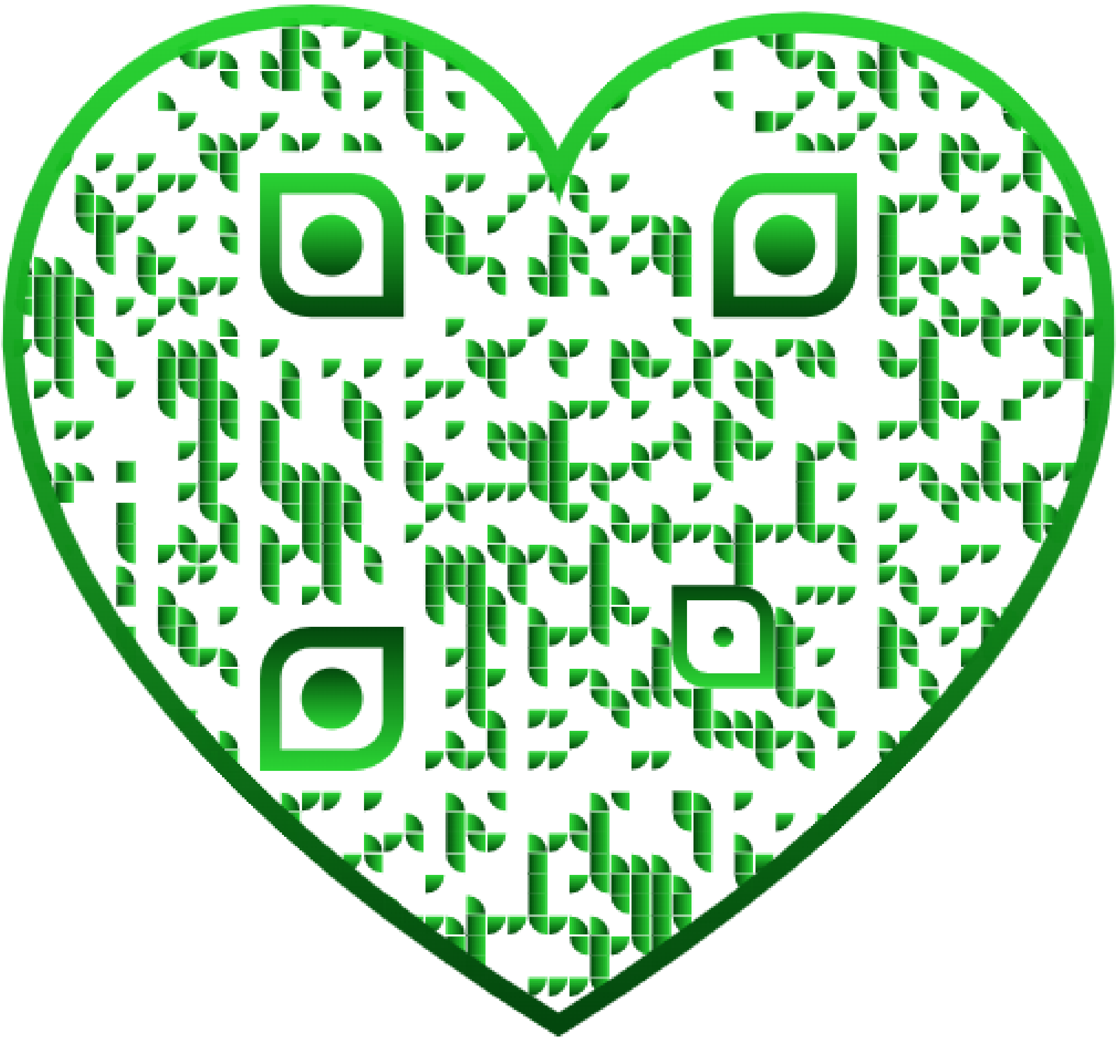


ZERO TO HERO

Neil Hodgson: Part 2

ICONIC METAL

1962 HONDA RC170



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012 NEVER A CROSSWORD

Our regular crossword is another mix of classic racing clues and all with the carrot on a stick of the chance to a win a pair of Weise Outlast Sirius 2.0 gloves worth £129.99. Go for it!

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We welcome all feedback, good, bad or indifferent here at *Classic Racer* towers. It's YOUR magazine so let us know what you think about *CR's* content and tell us what YOU want to see in YOUR magazine!

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Fred Pidcock tells the story of Mervyn Robinson: brother-in-law of Joey and fellow member of the legendary Armoy Armada.

028 NO MORE HEROES!

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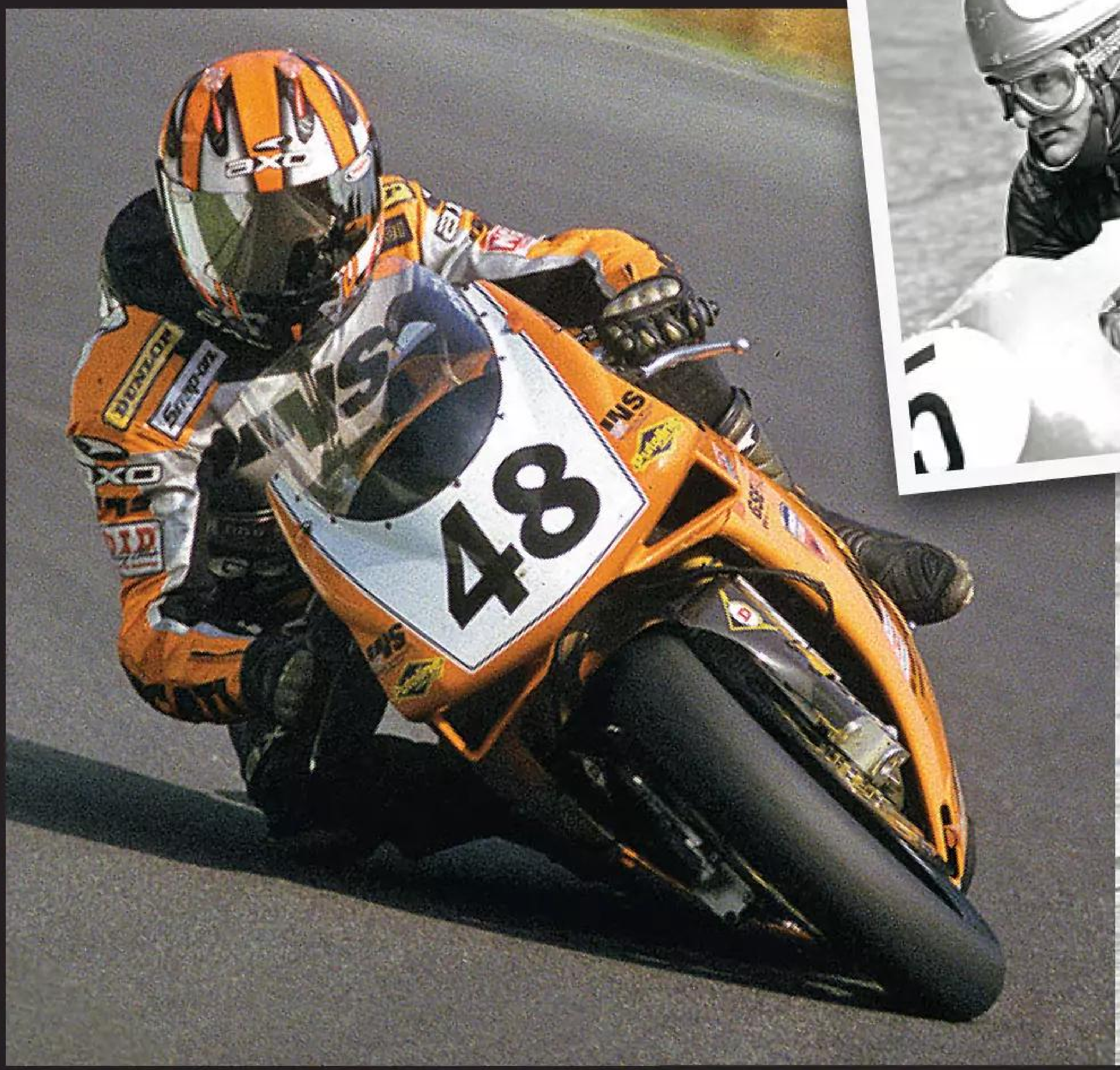
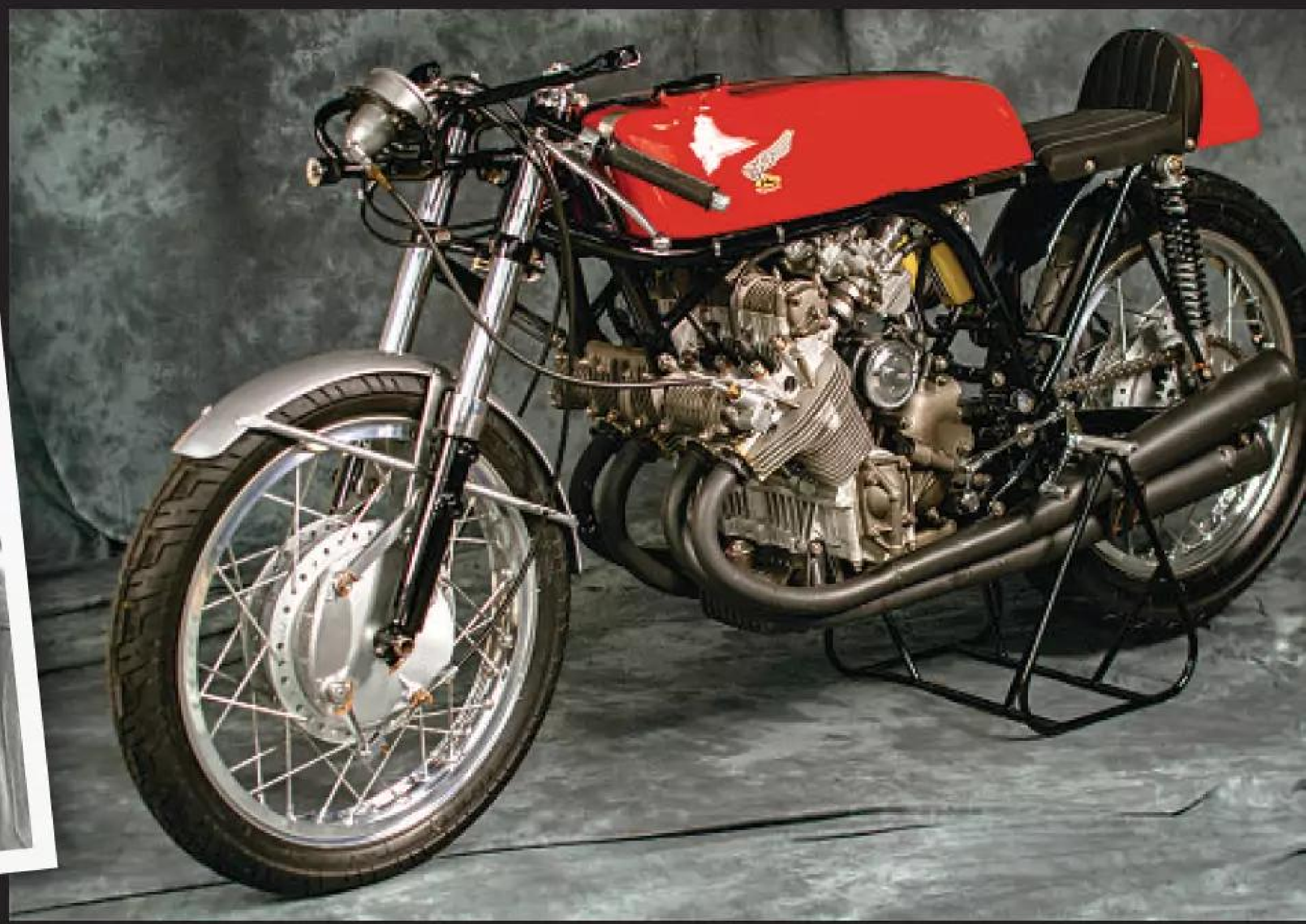
038 2000 SUZUKI RGV500 XR89

Alan Cathcart with the full story of how the smallest of Japanese Grand Prix factories refined their V4 500cc beast and used the talents of Kenny Roberts Junior to take the Y2K world championship.

050 CENTREFOLD

From the Mortons Archive we bring you the crown prince of paddock giggles and best man never to win the 500cc world championship – Randy Mamola!





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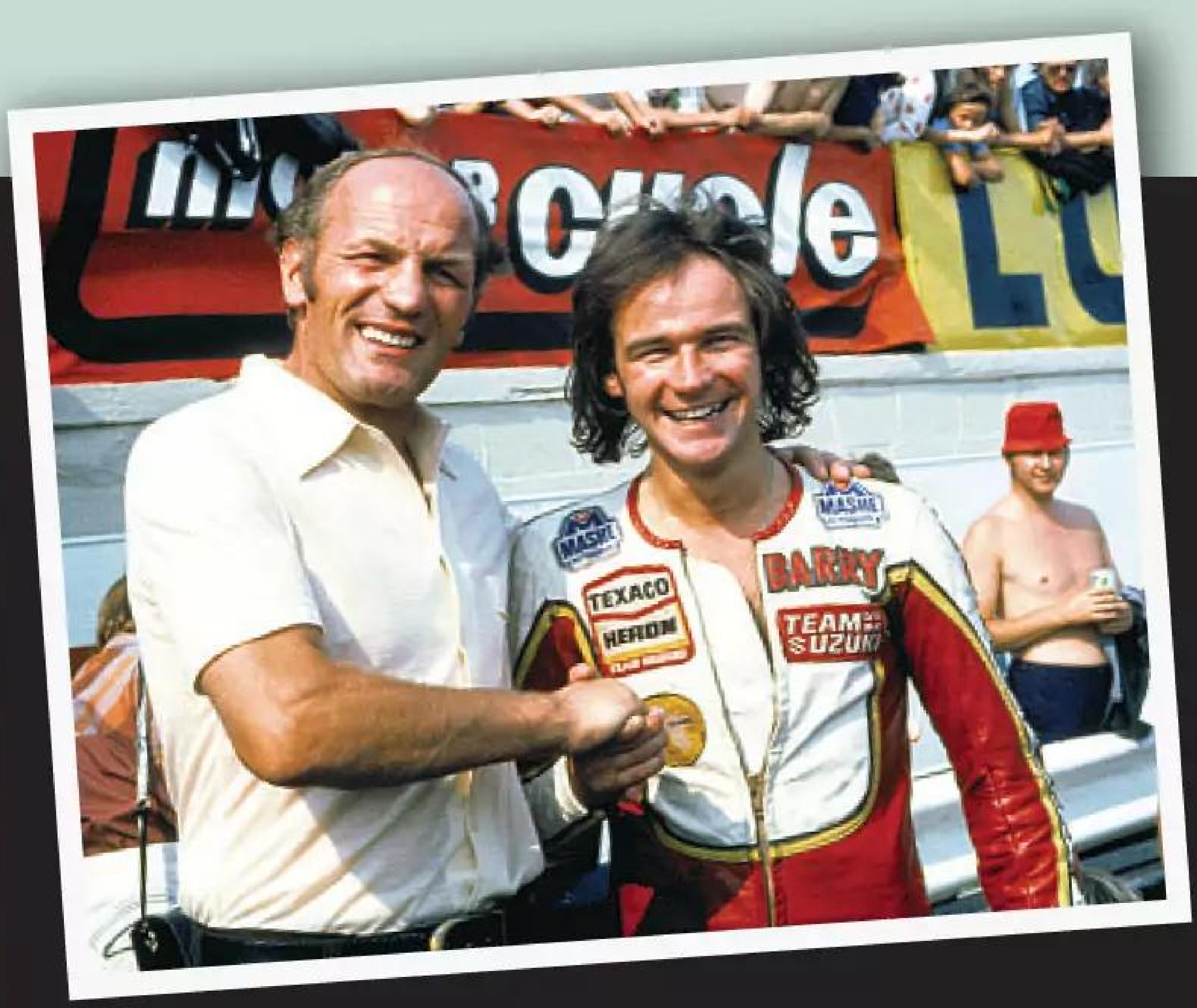

BUSH
BRIDGE

052 STUART HICKEN
Not just a team and circuit manager with many accolades behind him – also a handy racer, suspension expert and his autobiography is out soon!

058 ICONIC METAL: 1962 HONDA RC170
Terry Joslin's camera and Vince Rank's prose tell us about this stop-gap bit of engineering from Honda and how it helped Jim Redman to a 350cc world title…

066 BARRY SHEENE'S FIRST 500 WIN
Stuart Barker reminds us that it's 50 years since Sheene and Suzuki took the top-step of a 500cc Grand Prix podium. It would be the stepping-stone to Barry's two world titles.

074 NEIL HODGSON
Part two of his racing career sees Hodgy return home lacking confidence and feeling somewhat despondent. Thankfully he joins GSE Racing and bounces back to a BSB title and WSB wins!

082 TEAM ALLSPEED
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086 THE FRED CLARKE COLUMN
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088 NOEL POPE
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096 BACK IN THE DAY
YOUR pictures and memories from bike racing days gone by!

098 NEXT ISSUE
Plenty in the next issue of *Classic Racer*, including Neil Hodgson part 3 when he heads off to World Superbikes to become a champ, a detailed look at the history of the British Armstrong racing factory, more iconic metal and much, much more!

ISSUE 236

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

EDITOR
Bertie Simmonds
bsimmonds@mortons.co.uk

PUBLISHER
Tim Hartley
thartley@mortons.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE
Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive, Alan Cathcart, Stuart Barker, Fred Clarke, Clive Challinor, Geran van Mann, Fred Pidcock, Pete Crawford, Terry Joslin, Vince Rank, Pete Morris, Ben Rumbold and Tony Greenslade.

PRODUCTION EDITOR
Sarah Wilkinson

DESIGNER
Mark Field

GROUP ADVERTISING MANAGER
Sue Keily

ADVERTISING
Leon Currie
01507 529411
lcurrie@mortons.co.uk

SALES AND DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
Carl Smith

HEAD OF CUSTOMER MARKETING (SUBSCRIPTIONS)
Claire Aspinall

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR
Dan Savage

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR
Nigel Hole

EDITORIAL ADDRESS
Kelsey Media, Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle, Lincs
LN9 6JR UK

WEBSITE
www.classicracer.com

GENERAL QUERIES AND BACK ISSUES
01507 529529
24hr answerphone
help@classicmagazines.co.uk
www.classicmagazines.co.uk

ARCHIVE ENQUIRIES
Jane Skayman
01507 529423
jskayman@mortons.co.uk

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Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive

The Great Escape!

Words: Don Morley **Photographs:** Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive

m.lucchinelli

Don Morley, legendary photographer, gets his leg cast signed by Kenny Roberts

I always hated the Daytona Speed Week, due to the way we Europeans were treated.

The Americans often made you wait outside of the circuit for hours, whatever the weather, to sign-on in the first place: then they tried to palm us off with a mere press pass which would not actually allow you to go anywhere, so you could only work two infield corners.

We photographers were also worse off as our job was very physical; yet we were not even allowed into the press room which was the only place open for the week prior to the race, so we had no access to our colleagues, the journalists, or access to timing sheets, water, information etc.

Then the track itself was surrounded by very high (10/12ft) wire fences with the occasional gate, but they refused to open these up until race days, meaning we had to climb these fences with half a ton of equipment. Add in the fact that this was the south with the circuit having its own redneck police force and its own jail, and you realise they took security seriously.

That sets the scene for this shot – it was all a bit like 'The Great Escape'. I went out and bought a set of wire cutters and spent the best part of three days timing the gaps between the police patrols on the banking and then waited for the final timed practice for the big race – The Daytona 200. This session I knew people like Kenny Roberts would be out for. Timing things to perfection, I cut myself a hole in the wire, climbed up to the top of the banking, got my shots, and was arrested and thrown into jail shortly after BUT lucky for me they never thought to confiscate my film!

I know I should not have done such things, and never would or needed to elsewhere, but Daytona in my book was a real 'us and them' situation where I had no compunction whatsoever in breaking the rules! CR

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Mighty Mick!

Words: Bertie Simmonds **Photographs:** Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive

10
CYCLE NEWS
RENOLD
Shell Oils
MICHELIN
FERODO

Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive

SUZUKI
10
Motor Cycle News
HERON
ONLY

It's 40 years since that legend of British racing Mick Grant won his final championship – the MCN Superstock title – in 1985.

Granty is a straight-talking legend of 1970s and 80s British bike racing. With his no-nonsense Yorkshire upbringing he spoke as he found and earned his own core of fans in a time of the great Barry Sheene.

During his 20-year career, Mick did it all: Grand Prix wins on 250cc two-strokes, to seven Isle of Man TT wins, riding the ill-fated Honda NR500, a Macau GP win, TT-F1 racing and winning titles on production bikes. He was (and still is) a dab-hand at trials, too!

After quitting racing, he managed a string of talented racers and ran some top teams. He also described himself as a 'poacher turned gamekeeper' when he became chief technical scrutineer for BSB in the late 1990s.

In his excellent autobiography 'Takin' the Mick' there's this great anecdote. Mick says: "My first official protest was against the only bloke who was generally as dodgy as me: Steve Parrish! Steve found some extra speed from his FZ750 at Snetterton in 1985 and he won the race. I stumped up the protest fee and it transpired that a miniscule bump in the choke of Stavros' carbs had been illegally smoothed out and he was thrown out of the results. I felt terrible, as the mod would have given him no measurable advantage. His bike was quick as he was riding it well. Luckily Stavros was always fairly laid back and took it all in good part. People used to go over the line when it came to the rules in racing. I did. Others did and they always will. It's a fact of racing life that the biggest crime isn't doing it. It's being found out!" *CR*

Mick Grant
Seven-time Isle of Man TT winner
Two-time 250cc Grand Prix winner
1985 British Superstock Champion
and multiple British champion

HONDA

Fast Eddy!

1982, 83 and 84 World Trials Champion

Words: Don Morley **Photographs:** Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive

I think this was in Ibiza, maybe in 1977 or very late 1970s at least. I was over there for Honda who were holding a 'European Press Event' for an entire new range of trail bikes and other off-road motocross machines, and then various four-wheelers the following week. My job was to photograph them all for the various press kits that would be sent to journalists around the world.

Anyway, in secret, and before the launch we were killing three birds with one stone via flying the-then multi world motocross champion over to test what would be his next year's works bike, and also, they flew Eddy Lejeune over as they had just signed him up to contest the trials world championships for them on HRC machines. Remember, this was in those very heady Honda days when they used to be able to advertise the fact that: 'Honda Enters – Honda Wins.'

As I also happened to be quite a useful trials rider in those days, I got to help run Eddy's bike in before Eddy had even got to ride it, and what a fantastic 'money-no-object' bike it was too, as was another smaller 200cc engine trials prototype they also brought along for him to test, which I actually thought was better! These were both HRC factory bikes that never went into actual production, though years later they did offer a vastly expensive but still cut-price production version. *CR*

Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive

Compiled by: Ben Rumbold, MotoXwords

Classic Racer #38 CROSSWORD

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Across

1 and 4: From ___ __ ___, popular book on the history of GSE Racing. (7,2,7)

7: Small village outside Douglas that sees the TT course really get into gear. (5,5)

9: Juan ___ Mella, the first Spanish rider to score a podium in World Superbike, who sadly lost his life on a road bike in 1995. (5)

12: Final bend at the Dundrod Ulster GP course. (7)

14: Classic Australian circuit which hosted that country's first ever round of the WSB Championship. (4,4)

16: Herr Daiker, postwar German 125 and 250cc star for NSU. (4)

17: Signor Clementi, Kawasaki-mounted Italian who competed in WSB at the same time as Neil Hodgson. (4)

18: A vital part of the powerband, between the extremes. (8)

22: One of three Japanese racing brothers, this one partnered Kenny Roberts Junior during his world title season onboard the Suzuki RGV500. (8)

27: The lowest points-scoring position in Tarmac GP racing since the 1980s. (9)

29: Belgian forest that contain the Spa Francorchamps race circuit and probably contributes to the notoriously changeable weather there. (8)

30: Nickname of Neil Hodgson's bitter BSB rival who nearly stole the title from him! (7)

33 and 21 Down: Welsh off-road event that runs mid-week from Llandrindod Wells. (3,3,6)

34: Japanese rider who took the RC161 to its first Isle of Man TT, finishing a respectable 5th. (4,6)

35: John, a one-time GP winner when he was Barry Sheene's team-mate, finishing fifth in the first Championship that Sheene won. (7)

36: Inter-war star, known as the Cheltenham Flyer, who won the 350cc world title for Velocette at the age of 39. (3,6)

Down

1 and 15 Down: Smooth American who was double WSC Champion on the Ducati 888 machine. (4,5)

2: Home of the world-famous Festival of Speed. (8)

3: Products made by Silkolene, Castrol, and many others! (4)

5: Most large-capacity race bikes have more than one of these. (9)

6 and 19 Down and 32 Down: Biggest, and longest, race on the Japanese racing calendar, where the local manufacturers go all-out for victory! (6,5,4)

8: Jim, Dumfries native and successful BSB and TT racer in the 1990s. (6)

10: What is needed for 6 Down to make them harder-wearing and more competitive. (7)

11: Country that saw Kenny Roberts Jr clinch his only world title. (6)

13: A part that keeps 3 Down in place, usually made of rubber. (4)

15: See 1 Down.

19: See 6 Down.

20: Hubert, factory Zundapp star in the 80cc class, where he was second in the world without taking a win in 1984. (5)

21: See 33 Across.

23: Swiss GP racer who grew a successful engineering business, winning Moto2 world titles as a chassis designer. (5)

24: What you fit your tyres to. (4)

25: The best form of defense? Or an attempt to make a pass? (6)

26: The left-hander in the middle of the fast, snaking section of corners at the start of the traditional lap at Silverstone. (8)

28: Boss of the MotoGP team that ran Neil Hodgson on one of his machines. (1,5)

31: Tommy, Belfast boy who was one of the first non-Japanese factory riders and won in two classes at the first ever Japanese Grand Prix event. (4)

32: See 6 Down.

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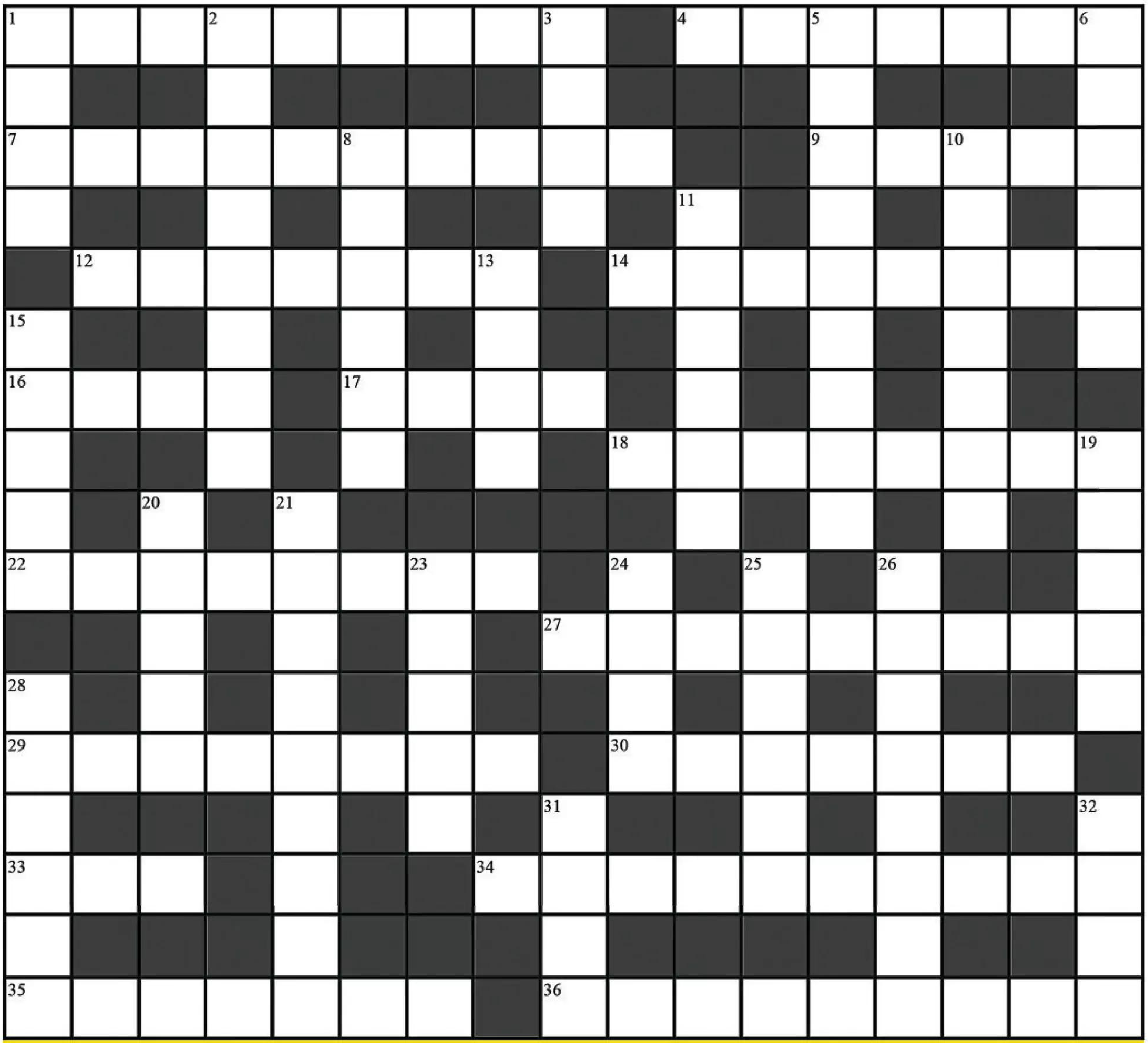

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The answers to last issue's *Classic Racer* crossword:

Across

1 and 5 Motorpoint Yamaha, **10** Lens, **11** Urs, **12** Aerodynamic, **15** Utah, **16** NR, **19** Karlskoga, **20** Nadia, **21** Catalunya, **24** Rings, **25** Huberts, **28** Eyes, **30** Scar, **31** Jack Findlay, **33** Pad, **35** Vito, **36** Nankai, **37** Terblanche

Down

1 and 25 Melbourne Hairpin, **2** Ossa, **3** Petrol, **4** New York, **6** Alpinestars, **7** ACU, **8** Austria, **9** Crafar, **13** Handlebar, **14** Gooseneck, **17** Jacarepagua, **18** Jet, **22** Nose, **23** Astrodome, **26** Socket, **27** Metisse, **29** Solo, **32** Yvon, **34** Don

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readerswrite

If you want to get in touch...
Then please do. We read every letter, email and comment sent to us and we enjoy hearing from you whether you've an event coming up, a motorcycle you own or just want to let us know about something you find interesting in *Classic Racer's* world.

Star letter

FANTASTIC FLAT-TRACKER

Dear *CR*
I enjoyed the feature about Kenny Roberts' TZ750 oval eater. I know that 100bhp may not sound like much in this day and age, but to be riding something peaky like that, on the dirt ovals with no brakes clearly takes a particular brand of bravery. So I salute the likes of Kenny and Stevie Baker.

More features on American flat-tracking and AMA racing please! But then I am a Yank who married a Brit, so I can feel a bit homesick sometimes! Don't tell the wife.
Warren Armstrong

The editor says: "Awww. Sorry you feel homesick Warren. Have a T-shirt and – yes – we will try and get a few more American features in for you."

STAR LETTER PRIZE

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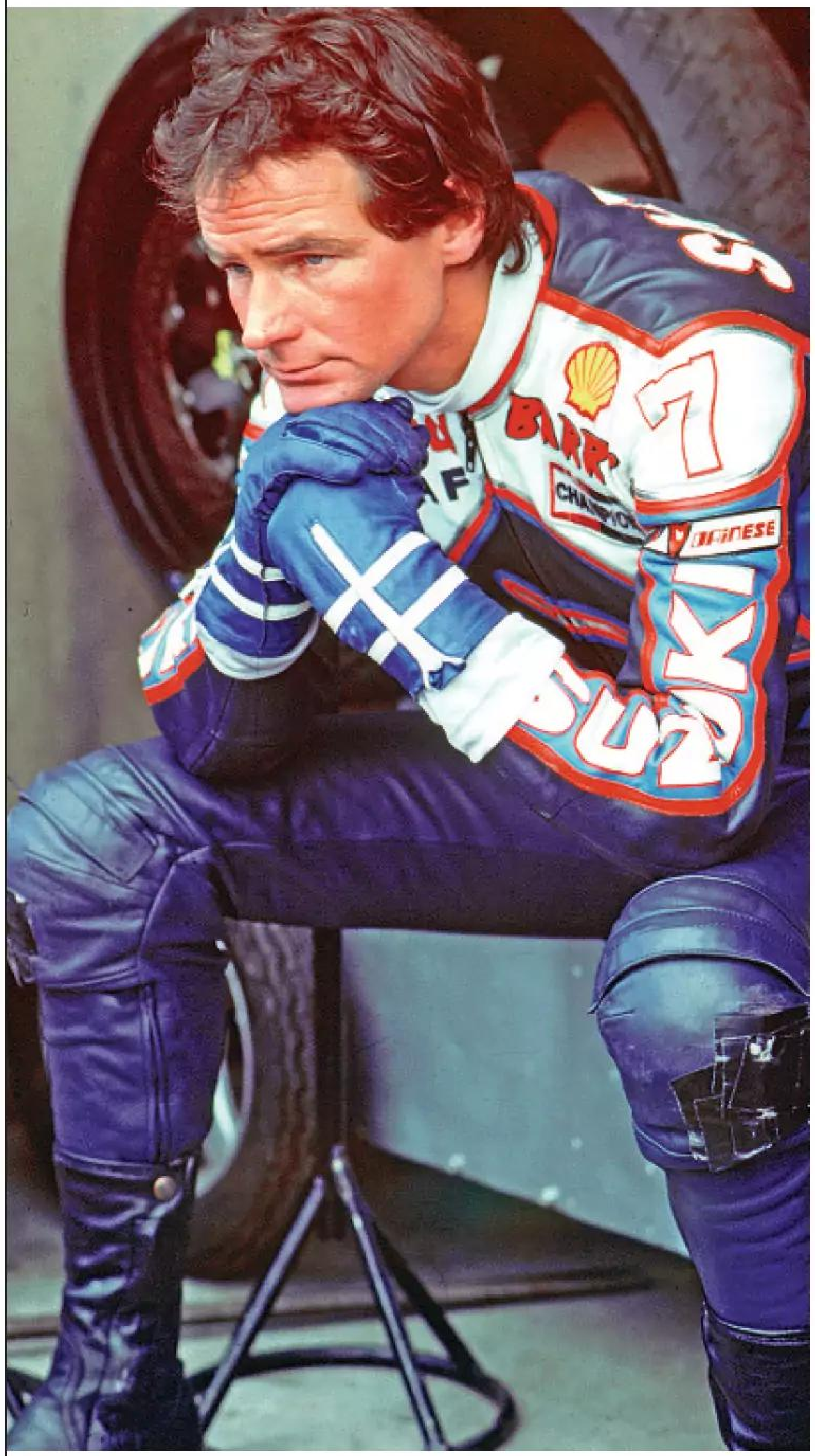
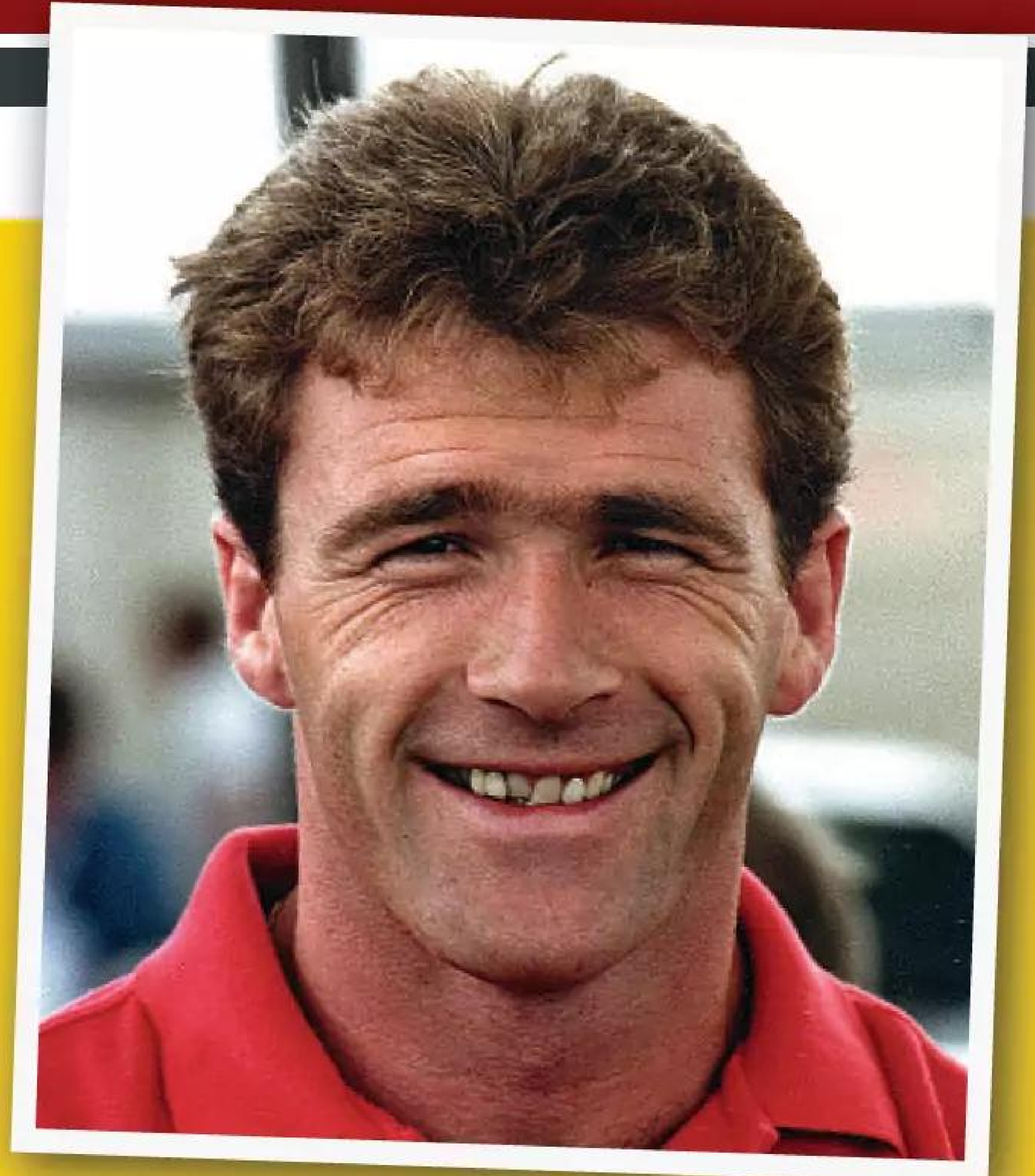


MIND GAMES!

Dear *CR*
Last issue's 'Mind Games' feature did make me chortle, but I think you've attributed the opening story incorrectly. I'm sure it was Barry Sheene who did that to someone – maybe to Ready, or maybe to someone else. Or did I dream it?

Either way it was an entertaining little read. I also recall one racer – who shall be nameless – being the victim of a certain Kevin Schwantz and a bet made about 'falling apart like a cheap watch?' I shall say no more, but I think it was in 1994.
Cliff Thompson

The editor says: "Yes Cliff – that story has many different possible racers in it. As to the Schwantz story...ahem. We heard that too, back in the early 1990s, but felt it wasn't suitable for our audience!"



MASTERFUL MAC

Dear *CR*
Finished reading the last issue of *CR* and loved the three Rob McElnea features. You forget really just how much he impacted the British bike race scene.

For me it's the teams he ran and the racers he helped to bring on as much as his TT wins and British title. One rider that sticks in my mind is definitely Darren Barton. He was literally just a real phenomenon and I recall him coming up through the ranks pretty quickly. While he made a massive impact on the British scene, I guess it's a case of 'what might have been' on the international circuit. Still, a great talent.
Steve Jenkins

The editor says: "Yes! Darren Barton – known as 'Chief' or 'The Flying Flea.' Lovely lad and could ride a bit!"

FORZA FRED!

Dear *CR*

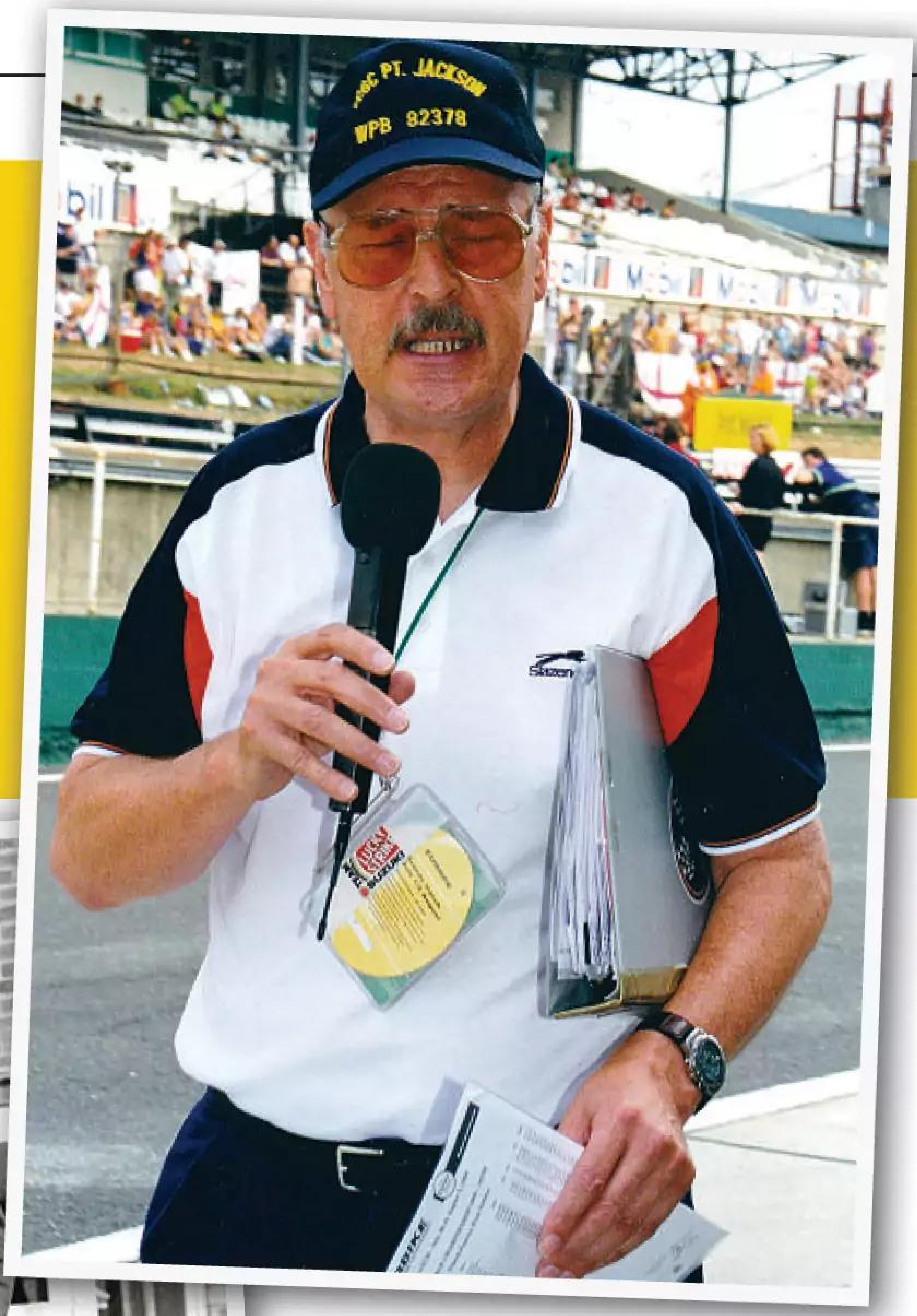
I don't normally drop a line to a magazine unless I'm annoyed, frustrated or otherwise drowning in negativity but I wanted to say how much I'm enjoying Fred Clarke's columns in *Classic Racer*.

Having had the pleasure of hearing Fred's – always incisive – commentary at race meetings around the UK, I was one of the many who was upset when he was 'let go' as the voice of British bike racing.

Thankfully, because of *CR*, he's still being 'heard' today. And I wonder if it's only me that reads his column in 'his' voice – if not at the same speed he'd rattle out his live commentaries!

Will Best

The editor says: "Fred is a legend."



SILLY SUBS PAGES!

Dear *CR*

Just a quick complaint about the subscription pages in *Classic Racer*. I feel these pages are a wasted opportunity to show another beautiful motorcycle race shot of years gone by.

I enjoy the 'Archive' pages and especially the last issue with shots from the great Don Morley. Can't we have another one of those? I for one would be more likely to resubscribe with a nice picture of someone from yester-year rather than some rubbish joke made up by the editor and slapped onto an old photo of Barry Sheene or John Cooper mowing his lawn. Sorry, but it's true.

Jim Brown

The editor says: "Oops! Sorry Jim. Don't look at page 22 then. What does everyone else think?"

CLOSE FINISH

Dear *CR*

I enjoyed the Alan Cathcart feature on the Yamaha YZR250 in the last issue, and can well remember that extremely close finish at Phillip Island between Olivier Jacque and Shinya Nakano. In fact, it got me and the hubby thinking: when has there been so close a Grand Prix finish for the title?

I mean, I can recall the 2006 MotoGP title going down to the wire between Valentino Rossi and Nicky Hayden, but I can't think of any others. Most of the world titles seem to be sewn up earlier these days. Thank goodness we've got British Superbikes where the formula seems to ensure that we get some great racing.

We were at that title decider at Donington Park in 1996 where James Whitham and Niall Mackenzie were equal on points going into that final round. I think (if memory serves) that Sean Emmett turned up as a wild-card and rather spoilt things by getting in the way. We were also at the 2011 last round at Brands Hatch, where it was a photo-finish between Tommy Hill and John Hopkins, and who can forget 2023 between Tommy Bridewell and Glenn Irwin, where it was won by half a point by Bridewell? And then last year between Kyle Ryde and Bridewell, with Ryde winning by a solitary point!

Maybe there's a lot to learn from the likes of Dorna, and perhaps a feature on historical 'close run things' in the various championships.

Julia Smith

The editor says: "Good idea! Of course the current 'showdown' format came into play after the 2009 title winner Leon Camier took the BSB title by about 140 points!"

PaddockGossip

Compiled by The *Classic Racer* team // Send your classic racing news to:
editor@classicracer.co.uk

Michelle Duff – a tribute

Born Michael Alan Duff on December 13, 1939, in Toronto, Canada, Mike became fascinated by motorcycle racing at a very young age.

His natural talent was obvious so, in 1960, he left for England to live his dream of racing on the British short circuits, the Isle of Man and in Grand Prix racing.

His reputation was quickly won and by 1964 Phil Read recommended him as his team-mate on the first official Yamaha factory team in the GPs.

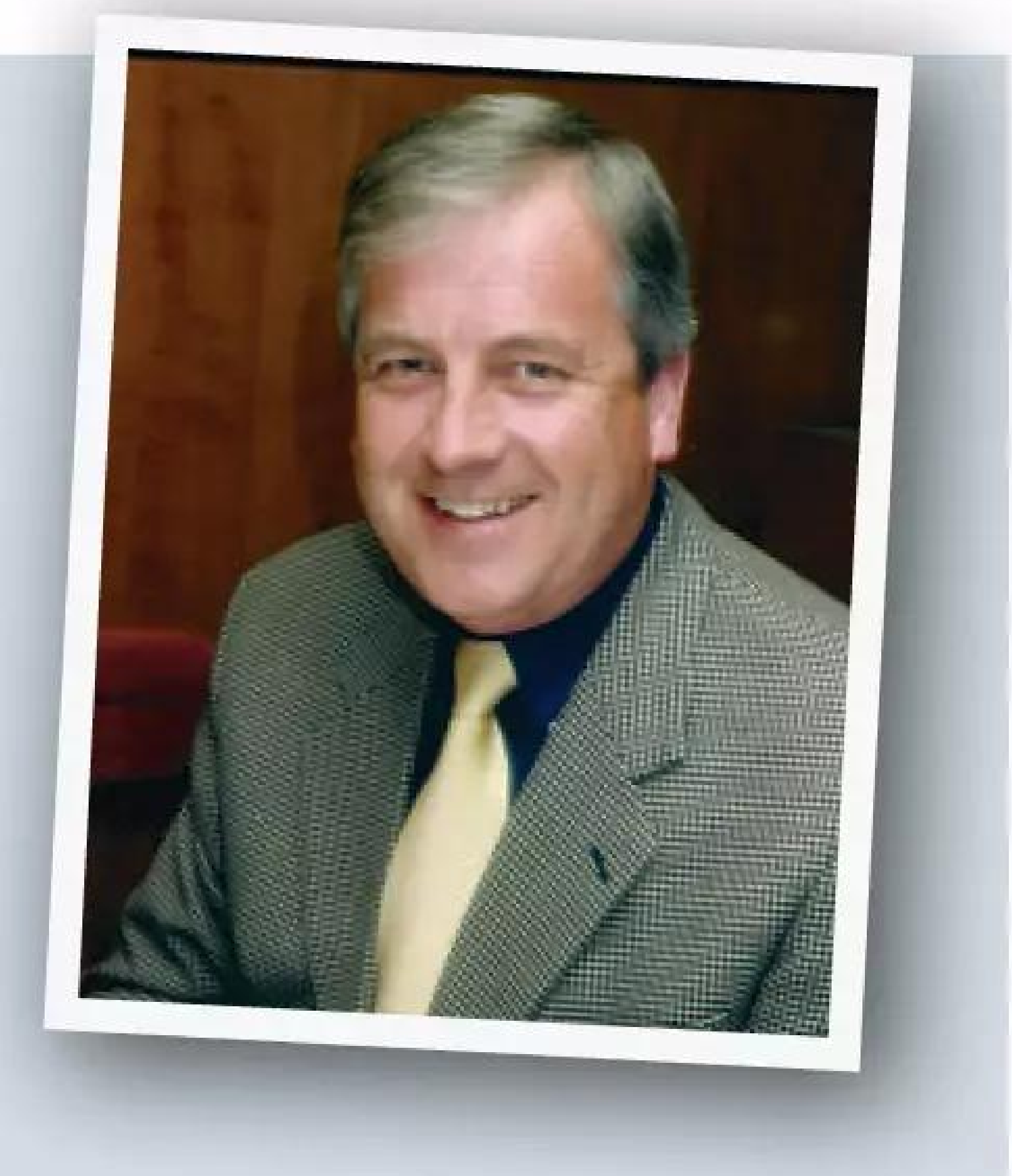
Duff is still the only Canadian to win a Grand Prix. He won the 1964 250cc Grand Prix in Belgium, and in 1965 won the 125cc Dutch TT and the 250cc Finnish Grand Prix, along with a total of 24 podiums.

Sadly, at the end of the 1965 season he was badly hurt while testing a new prototype in Japan, and his injuries caused him major problems for the rest of his career. His return to racing in 1966 was the subject of a Canadian film documentary called 'Ride For Your Life'.

Mike married in 1963 and together he and his wife had a son and a daughter. By the early 1980s years of questioning and self-doubt led Mike in 1984 to change his name to Michelle Ann Duff and begin gender reassignment surgery. Dropping out of her former motorcycle racing life, she became a civil-servant in Ontario but also dabbled in wildlife photography.

Michelle did eventualy attend historic race events in recent years and wrote a book: 'Make Haste Slowly' about her bike racing days, along with a second edition which included more on her transition into Michelle. She moved to Nova Scotia where she lived a quite life with her beloved pets. She passed away aged 85 on July 23.

Paul Fowler – an obituary



Paul Fowler – who passed away on September 9 – was one of those thoroughly likeable blokes that you run into in life. When I first met him in the mid-1990s, it was like I'd been chatting to him for years, and I couldn't work out why...

He started out working on the Tamworth Herald as a local newspaper reporter, later joining Motor Cycle News as an off-road reporter. He would launch 'Dirt Bike Rider' for MCN's parent company EMAP in the early 1980s, before he moved back to the weekly newspaper to cover Grand Prix road-racing. It was during this time that he began his long friendship with legendary motorcycle race reporter John 'Ace' Brown.

By 1988 he'd left MCN and helped form Action Media International, where he began to work with some of the biggest race teams in the world, helping them maximise their media coverage. Over the years he'd work with teams such as Rothmans Honda, Pepsi Suzuki and JPS Norton.

He'd also work with Brian Kreisky – the man who provided television coverage of two and four-wheeled sports for broadcast and was behind the Duke Video titles such as 'Havoc' and 'Bike Havoc'. Paul was often the narrator on the motorcycle videos: little wonder why I recognised his voice! I loved Duke Videos...

Paul would later help guide PR for the Motorcycle Industry Association, teach communication skills in schools and ran a pub. In the late 1990s he would return to race paddocks as Suzuki's world superbike press officer in 1997 and in British Superbikes with Kawasaki a few years later.

One of his great loves was acting and he joined the Guild of Drama Adjudicators and even became a humanist funeral celebrant, officiating at the funeral of our dear friend John Brown in 2012. In recent years he'd also joined the Cheltenham Silver Band as an adult learner on the euphonium.

I will remember my friend Paul with great fondness for the kindness and time he showed me when I started out in motorcycle journalism.

All at *Classic Racer* would like to express their condolences to the family and friends of Paul, especially his partner Rosemary.

Bertie Simmonds

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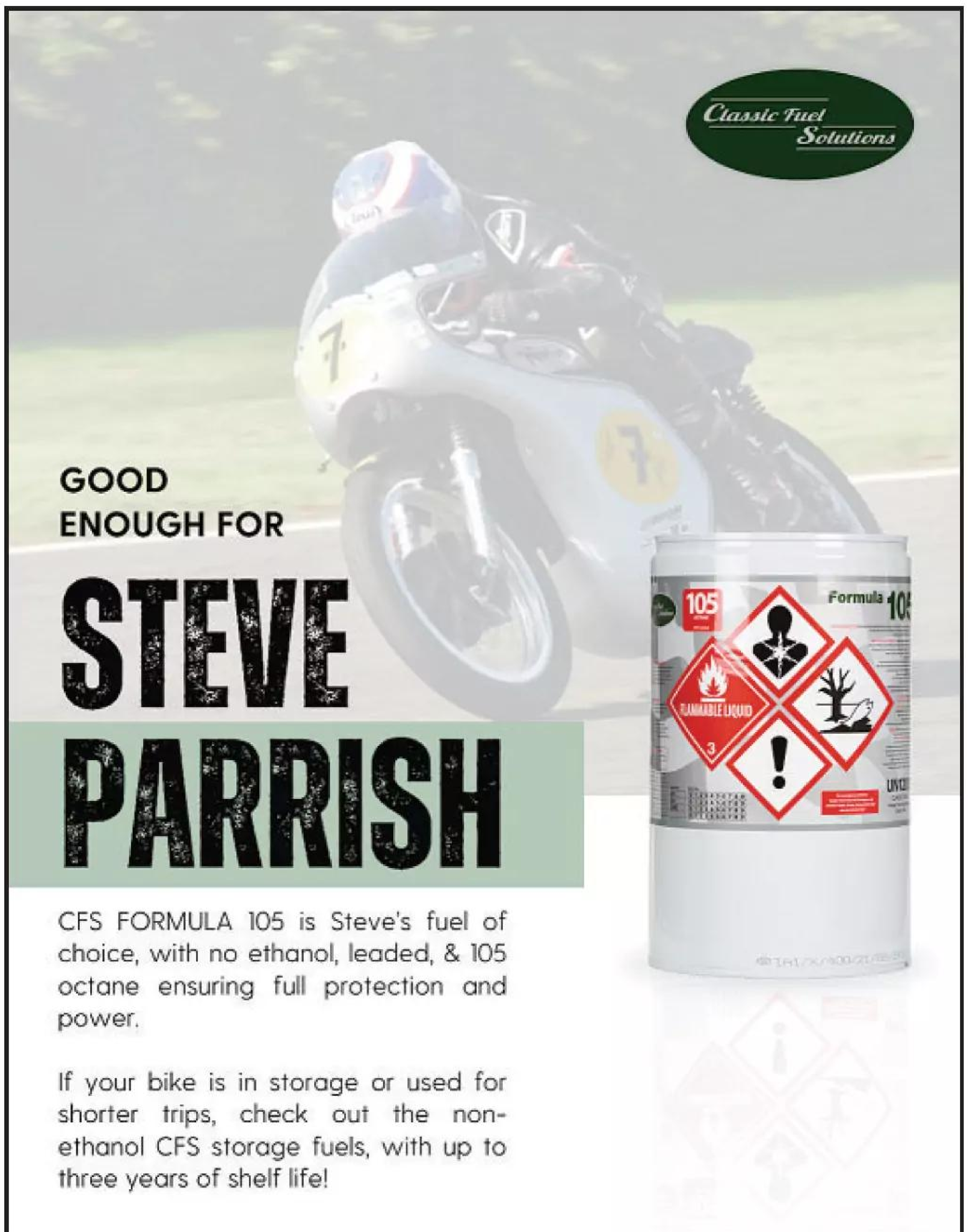

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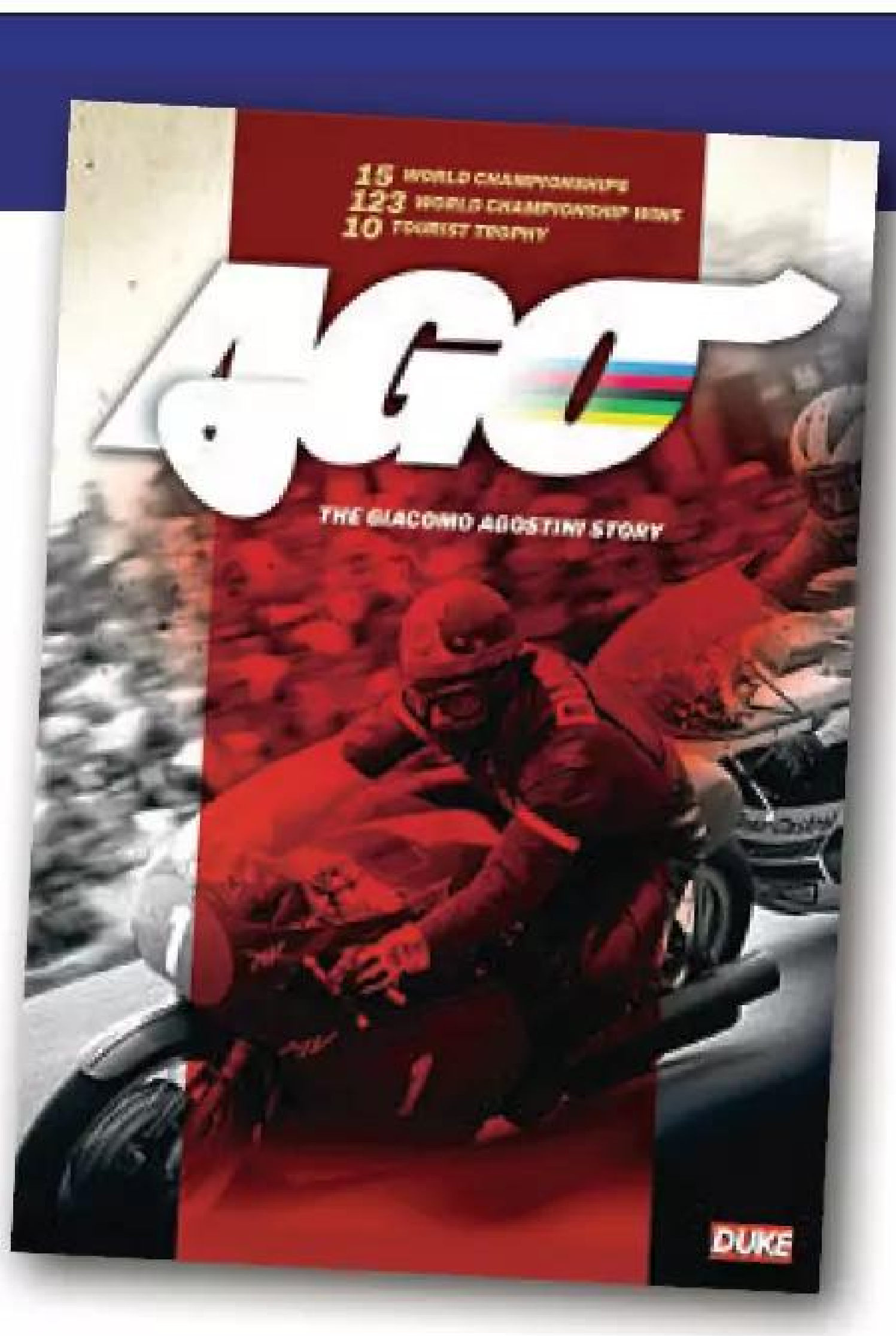
Ago on DVD!



If you love Ago (and who doesn't) then you will want to see the highly anticipated documentary 'Ago: The Giacomo Agostini Story' now available on DVD from Duke Video.

In the 90-minute documentary, you'll find out all about the man who ruled the racing world: with 15 World Championships, 122 Grand Prix wins and 10 TT victories. This DVD features stunning archive footage and in-depth interviews and costs £19.99: **www.dukevideo.com**

Tamiya Yamaha FZR750R OW01

Yamaha
FZR750R OW01

The late 1980s was a glorious time for production-based racers and especially the limited-edition machines like the Honda VFR750R RC30 and the Yamaha FZR750R OW01.

This is the Tamiya 1/12th scale OW01, released in 1989 that you could build, even if you couldn't afford the real thing! Re-released in October, it comes with a colour pamphlet containing pictures and information on the real bike. It costs around £30 and is available from: **wheelspinmodels.co.uk**

Yosh auction!

Suzuki and Hideo 'Pops' Yoshimura have been names joined at the hip since 1978, and this bike celebrates that long association. And we think it's breathtaking.

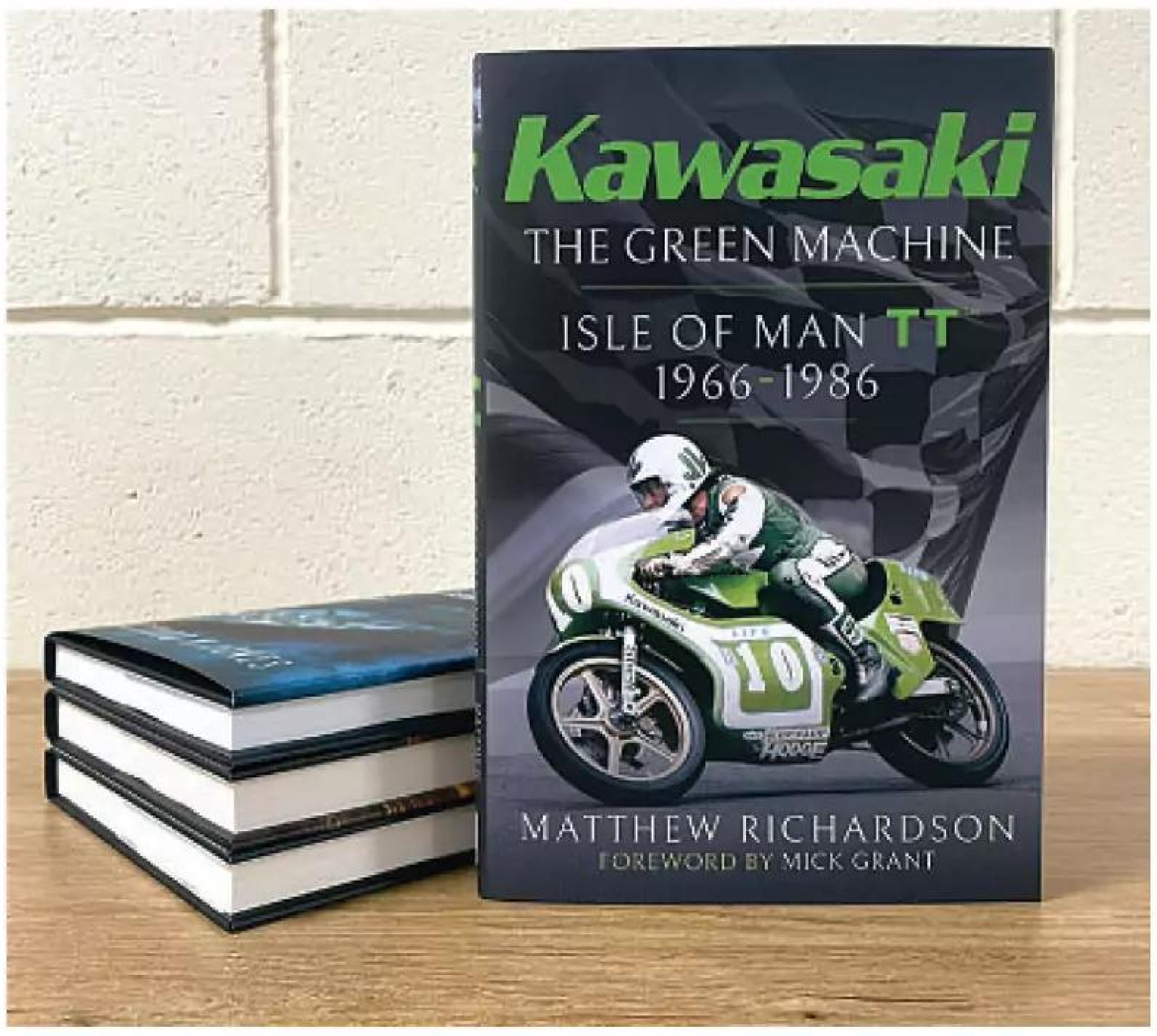
Built using an original 'slabby' Suzuki GSX-R750 model, this is similar to that taken to victory by Kevin Schwantz at the Daytona 200 as well as the bikes that scooped three successive All-Japan TT-F1 titles between 1985-1987 with riders Satoshi Tsujimoto and Yukiya Ohshima. This build is called the '604 Complete Machine' and models the bike that Tsujimoto raced at Daytona in 1986.

It uses a custom Cyclone exhaust system, as well as upgraded suspension and brakes. Much engine work and uprated Mikuni TMR MJN32 carbs mean this has plenty of poke, too. It's currently up for auction, so you've just got time to bid before it ends on October 18. Best have deep pockets: bidding starts at £33,400! For more go to: **yoshimura-auction.com/product/604_1/?lang=en**

Kawasaki TT book

Kawasaki – The Green Machine – Isle of Man TT 1966-1986 charts the development of various motorcycles from the manufacturer to take part in 20 years of TT racing.

Be they two-strokes or four-strokes, triples, twins or four-cylinders – they are all here. Author Matthew Richardson delves deep into the subject matter, charting the successes or otherwise of this magnificent marque. Foreword is by Mick Grant. The book costs £22 and is available from: **www.pen-and-sword.co.uk**



Editor's welcome

If we're lucky, we get the opportunity to get old – I know I've said this before – but it came home to me again recently, but I make no apologies for sounding a bit like a stuck record!

The news that our industry had lost two legends within a day hit like a hammer blow, but I could only guess at how much harder it hit their families and loved ones.

Paul Fowler was a friend and someone who was very good to me in the early stages of my career in motorcycling in the mid-1990s and I will miss him very much. He was part of the fabric of my interest in bike racing when I was growing up, being often heard as the narrator on a wide-range of the old Duke Videos I used to have.

Malc Wheeler was a larger-than-life character and former editor of *Classic Racer*. I hadn't really bumped into Malc until I joined Mortons in 2013. To be fair, I had a couple of run-ins with him as we both could be a bit stubborn and irascible, but we soon had a mutual respect and he always helped me out if I needed him on *Classic Motorcycle Mechanics*.

It's fair to say that Malc helped shape *Classic Racer* being as he was editor for a decade or so and was also a contributor to the title even after his successor (and my predecessor) Tony Carter took over.

Malc personified much of what's best in the racing community: comradeship, benevolence, gritty determination along with a big dollop of humour!

We've got a two-page tribute on Malc in this issue over the next two pages and we know that every CR reader of old will miss him.

Rest easy, Malc.

Bertie

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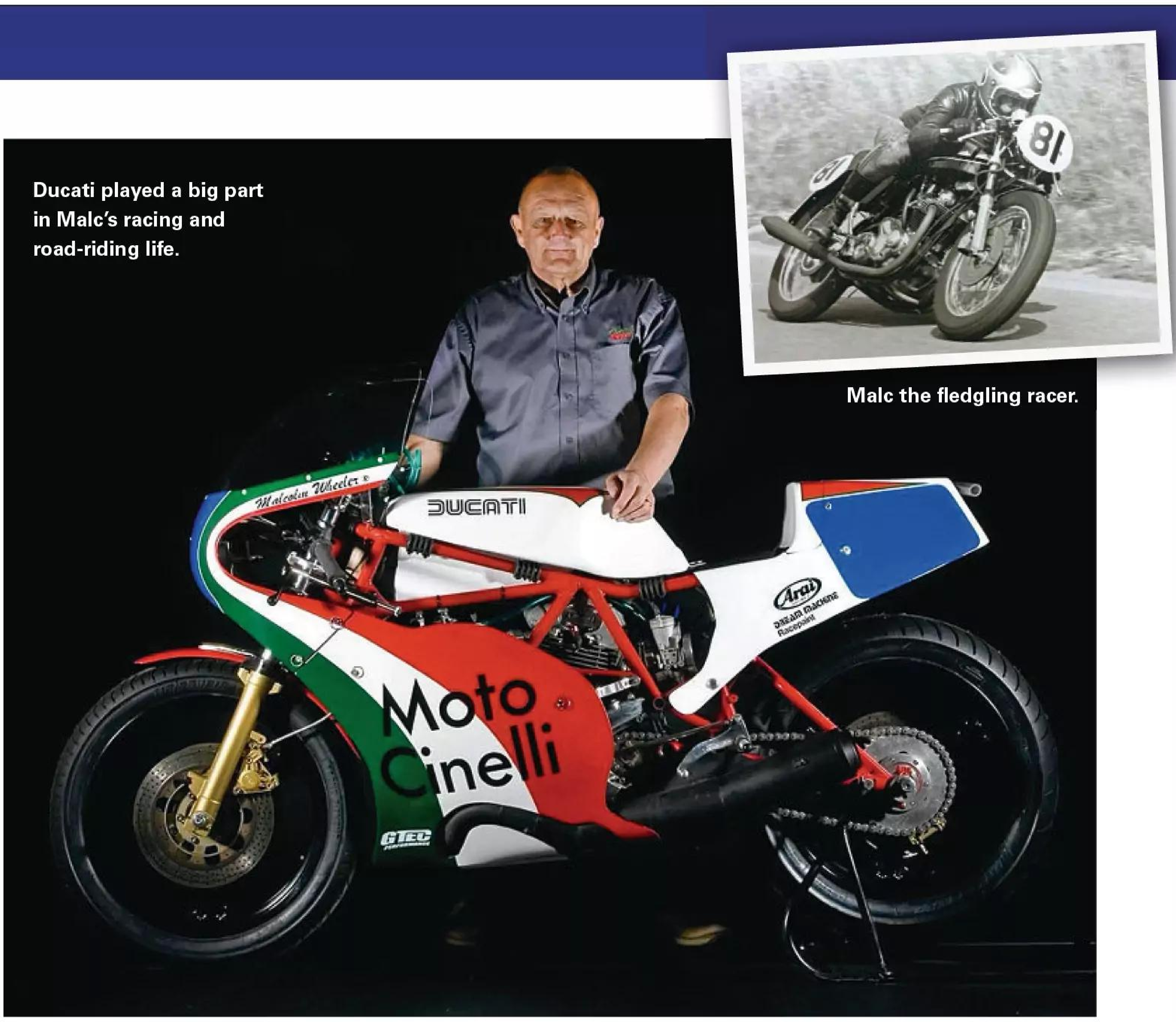

Ducati played a big part in Malc's racing and road-riding life.

Malc the fledgling racer.

Malcolm Wheeler – a tribute

Classic Racer is sad to report that former editor – Malc Wheeler – passed away on September 10, aged 77.

Malc started out in the motorcycle industry back in 1976, when he took a job as a salesman for Freddie Frith Ltd in Grimsby. He would hold down a number of jobs in the industry, including at RA Wilson's in Louth, and became Dealer Development Manager UK Ducati importer Moto Cinelli.

Racing would become a passion for Malc. He joined forces with good friend Mick Parrish and the pair set about converting Malc's road bike for racing. In Malc's own words: "The bike never missed a beat! And we won our first ever race – but then I started crashing. But collarbones don't take long to heal and skin grows back!"

In his long and distinguished race career, Malc developed a love both for his local circuit Cadwell Park and the Isle of Man TT course.

His first foray on the famous Mountain Course came in 1974, in the Manx Grand Prix Senior, on a Seeley – a DNF didn't hint at the success that was to come.

Participating in the TT from 1976 until 1990, Malc would take three podiums. The first in the 1979 Formula 3 TT, when he took 3rd on an Aermacchi, he would take a superb 2nd place in the 1986 Production Class C category on a Kawasaki, and a year later followed that up with another 2nd, this time in Production Class D on a Yamaha.

Malc was later reunited with that 1986 Kawasaki GPZ600R which was restored for him in 2018 – he was so proud and excited to see it again. He often recalled his 'one second' race where he and winner Gary Padgett were separated by a single second. Behind were riders of the calibre of Steve Linsdell, Joey Dunlop and Roger Burnett…

Malc was proud of his eight silver replicas from the TT (and one from the 1976 Manx) as well as six bronze replicas. It's also likely that Malc will remain the fastest Laverda rider around the Island as – in 1983 – he took a bored-out 600cc Laverda to an average of almost 104mph with a fastest lap approaching 105mph… It may never be beaten! His final race on his beloved Isle of Man came in 1990, when, according to Malc:

Wife Julie says his replicas were always in pride of place!

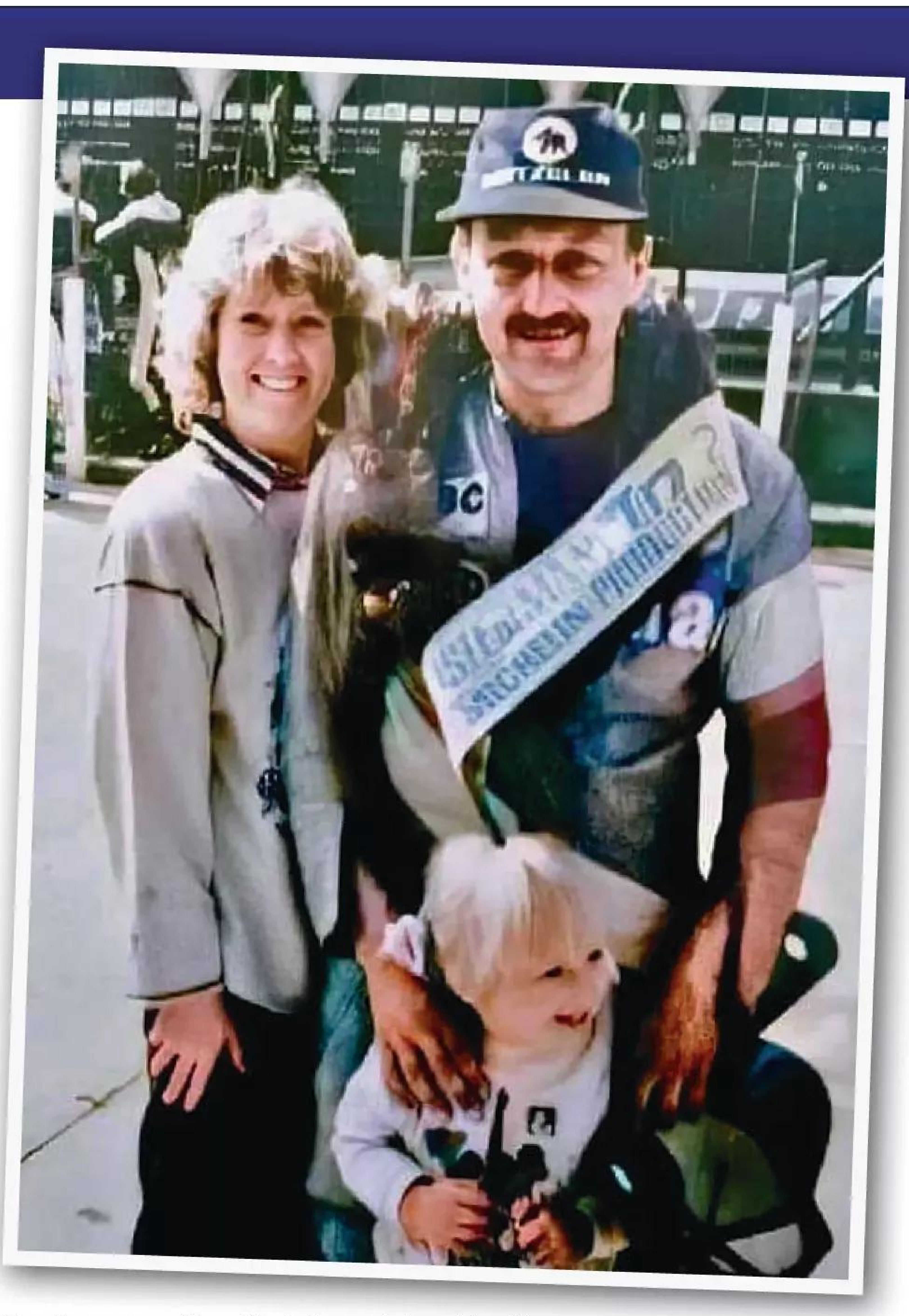
"I thought I'd retired from the TT after my 1989 crash at Handley's, but my friend Bob Heath had other ideas and he gave me a great little Yamaha FZR400R to ride. It wasn't my greatest ride as I was still carrying an injury (21st place), but I'll forever be grateful to Bob for that."

Of course, his love of the Isle of Man went beyond just competing. Malc became President of the TT Riders' Association between 2013-2014. The TT Riders' Association is a registered charity that looks after the welfare of injured and infirm TT riders, the families of riders who pay the ultimate price on the circuit, as well as helping older, former TT riders in need. Malc was honoured to become the president of the TTRA and engaged in fundraising events with his trademark enthusiasm and energy.

Malc also had a 25-year career in publishing and events management with Mortons Media Group. He joined Mortons in 1994 to head up *Old Bike Mart*. The monthly newspaper quickly grew under his stewardship, driven by his strategy of going out to motorcycle events, autojumbles and rallies across the country, meeting and greeting the readers and making extra sales as a consequence.

Malc became a sort of 'bike industry expert' for Mortons, and they soon acquired titles such as *The Classic MotorCycle*, *Classic Motorcycle Mechanics*, *Classic Racer* and *Classic Bike Guide*, along with the two highly popular Stafford classic shows and the Bristol *Classic Motorcycle* show.

As part of the always busy and successful events team, Malc would marry his love of events and racing, helping to lure a number of star guests to the various shows. These included Eddie Lawson, Wayne Rainey, John Surtees and Christian Sarron. Perhaps his greatest coup was in 2016 when he got the stars of the 1970s film 'On Any Sunday': Dave Aldana, Gene Romero, Don Emde and Mert Lawwill to attend Stafford.



Family man: with wife Julie and daughter Suzanne.

He loved events: flanked by Roger Marshall and Steve Plater.

Malc would eventually take the helm of *Classic Racer* magazine and also devise the yearly, pre-TT *Island Racer* annual. During such a busy time, Malc even managed to 'fit in' a racing comeback, when he rode a Multistrada 620 in the Desmodue Championship at Cadwell Park in 2006. Riding the quirky 'sit-up' Strada he qualified sixth in the wet and took an 11th: there was life in the old dog yet, but this time he declared himself officially 'retired' from racing.

Retirement 'proper' came in 2016 when Malc left Mortons and handed the reins of *Classic Racer* to Tony Carter.

Malc married wife Julie in 1969, she was his rock, his partner in life, supporter of his race career and they shared all of life's highs and lows together. Their daughter Suzanne tragically passed away aged 25, and Malc was also diagnosed with Lymphoma twice. Malc typically then threw himself into raising money for Lymphoma Action with his trademark consummate energy.

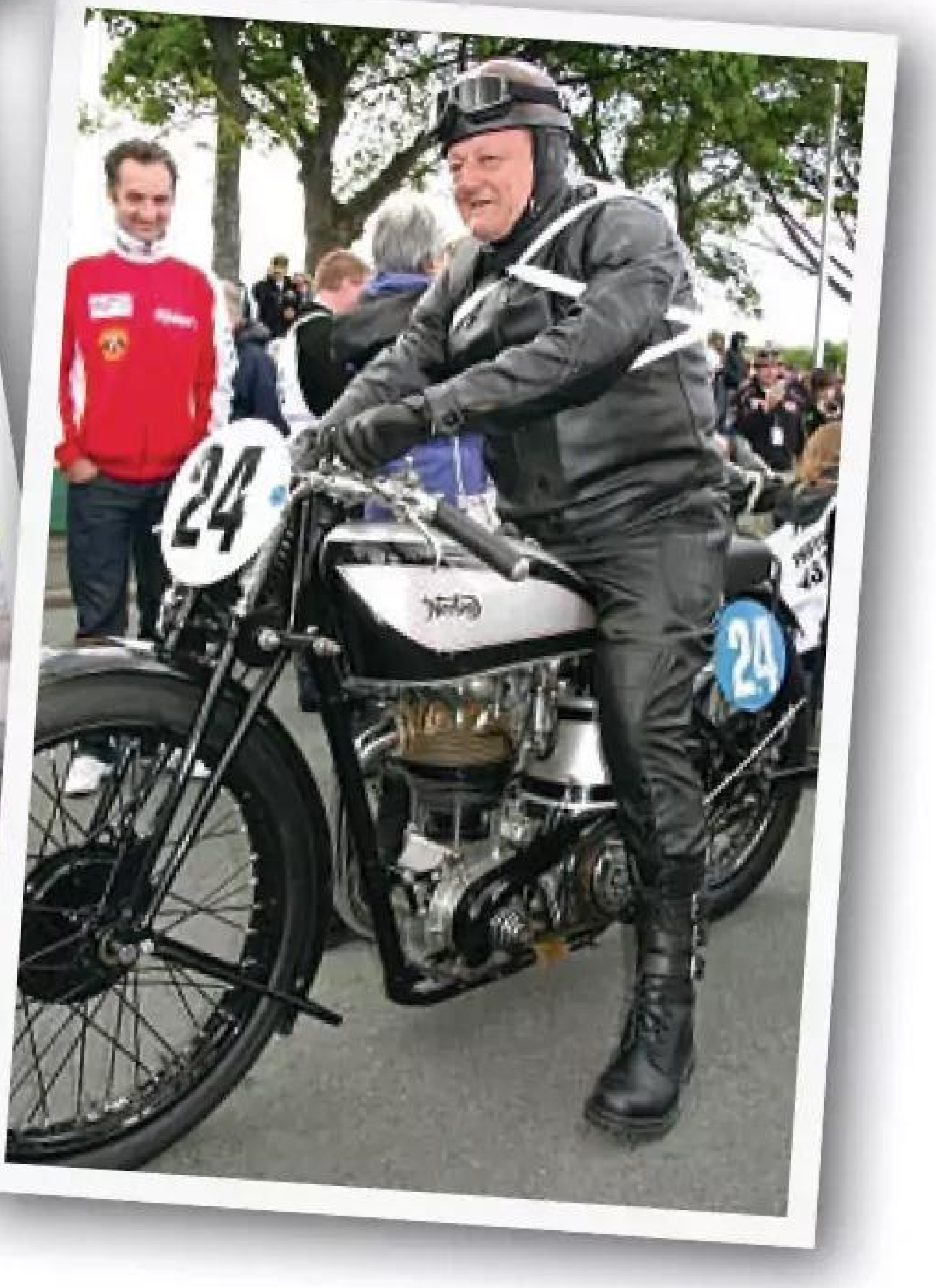
His later years were spent enjoying his well-earned retirement with Julie – and their beloved dog Mr Harvey – visiting friends and acquaintances.

Announcing Malc's passing, Julie said: "Malc leaves behind a wonderful legacy – not only as a devoted husband, father and friend, but also as a proud TT racer, whose love for bikes and the racing community was such a huge part of his life. His spirit, determination, and the joy he found on two wheels will always be remembered."

Ride on, Malc. With love from all at *Classic Racer*.

Flying on the Aermacchi. He'd take a TT podium for the manufacturer.

The final TT: the 1990 event on a bike loaned to him by Bob Heath.



About to enjoy a parade lap! Michael Rutter looks on.

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Whatever happened to?

MERVYN ROBINSON

Words: Fred Pidcock
Photographs: Steven Kerr, NW200.org, Armoy Road Races, Conor McGinn, Ulster Man, Duke Marketing

One of the legendary 'Armoy Armada', Mervyn Robinson's popularity is still undiminished, even almost 50 years since his appearance in The Road Racers documentary.

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H.OKANE MOTORS ARMOY
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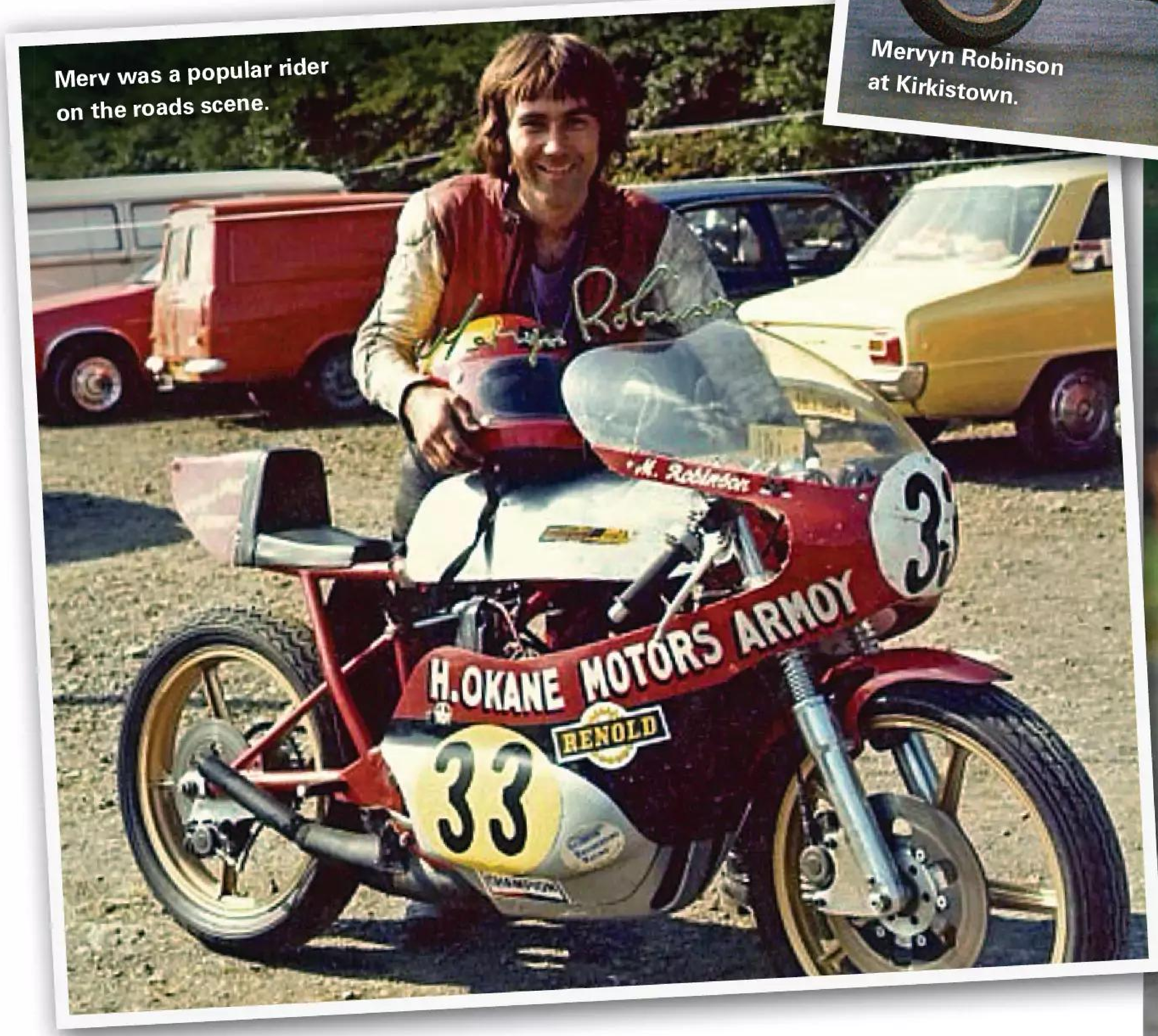
Mervyn Robinson at Kirkistown.



Merv was a popular rider on the roads scene.

"Nothing stirs the emotions like racing: exhilarating to watch as a neutral; traumatic for family and friends in pit-lane; an adrenaline-rush like no other for the competitor; impossible to understand for the uninitiated – but a tradition in Ireland and beyond that has drawn huge crowds for generations".

So wrote Roy Harris in his excellent 2014 book Just for the Thrill, a history of competitive motorcycling in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, and yet it is hard to over-estimate the difficulties in promoting and running such races in that decade given the backdrop of civil unrest and violence generally referred to as 'The Troubles'. It is also to the great credit of riders such as Tony Rutter, Steve Parrish, Mick Grant, Alex George, Percy Tait, Geoff Barry and so many more, who accepted the risks not only of the road circuits but of the volatile situation of 1970s Ulster, especially for riders coming over from the UK mainland.

Of all the epic battles in Ulster racing in the 1970s, Ray McCullough's 1971 Ulster GP 250cc victory over Phil Read, Jarno Saarinen and Dieter Braun has achieved almost legendary status, closely followed in terms of local popularity by the 1975 Ulster GP 500cc race won by the subject of this profile, Mervyn Robinson.

The collective term 'Armoy Armada', referring to Mervyn Robinson, Frank Kennedy, Joey and (later) Jim Dunlop, immortalised in David Wallace's 1977 film The Road Racers, dates back to the mid-1970s, but the story begins almost a decade earlier when, on a virtually zero budget, Robinson and Kennedy, both from the little village of Armoy in Co. Antrim, had started racing, riding anything they could lay their hands on, remaining uncompetitive until they acquired a Tiger Cub for the 200cc class.

It was in 1967 that Robinson met and fell for Joey Dunlop's sister Helen, and, as their relationship developed (they married in 1971), so he came more into contact with Joey, who prior to that time had not shown any particular interest in racing

The friendship between the two men grew, and Robinson's enthusiasm for racing was infectious, such that in 1968 he sold Joey a Tiger Cub racer which marked the real start of Joey's career, and the mechanical aptitude and skills of both men were to serve them well as they progressed.

Also, in 1968 Hugh O'Kane had started his car and bike business just outside Ballymoney, and in 1970 took up premises in Armoy, where it still trades to this day. Hugh O'Kane was, and still is, a true enthusiast for racing – he also possessed an elderly AJS 7R which Frank Kennedy rode in 1971. Both Joey Dunlop and Robinson had a play with the bike, and the latter rode it in the 1972 Junior Manx Grand Prix where, according to Hugh O'Kane, he: '…broke the frame in six places and then ran out of fuel.' The loan of that 7R was at least a limited form of sponsorship for the cash-strapped Robinson, and it was to be the start of an association between the two men which would last throughout Robinson's racing career.

For 1973 O'Kane bought a 350cc Aermacchi for Robinson to ride and on which he achieved some good placings, but the 350cc class was becoming dominated by the two-stroke Yamahas, so for 1974 the Aermacchi was replaced by a Yamaha TR2B-engined Seeley, the 'Yamsel', a machine which was ridden at one time or other by Robinson, Kennedy and Dunlop, with Robinson chalking up his first major wins, at Carrowdore then Kirkistown in the Embassy Championship final.

For the 1975 season Hugh O'Kane bought a TZ350 motor from Chester dealer and TT rider Bill Smith, which Robinson installed in the Seeley frame, and that August took the bike to victory in the Ulster GP referred to earlier, then finished off the season with a

4
H. O'KANE MOTORS ARMOY
hell

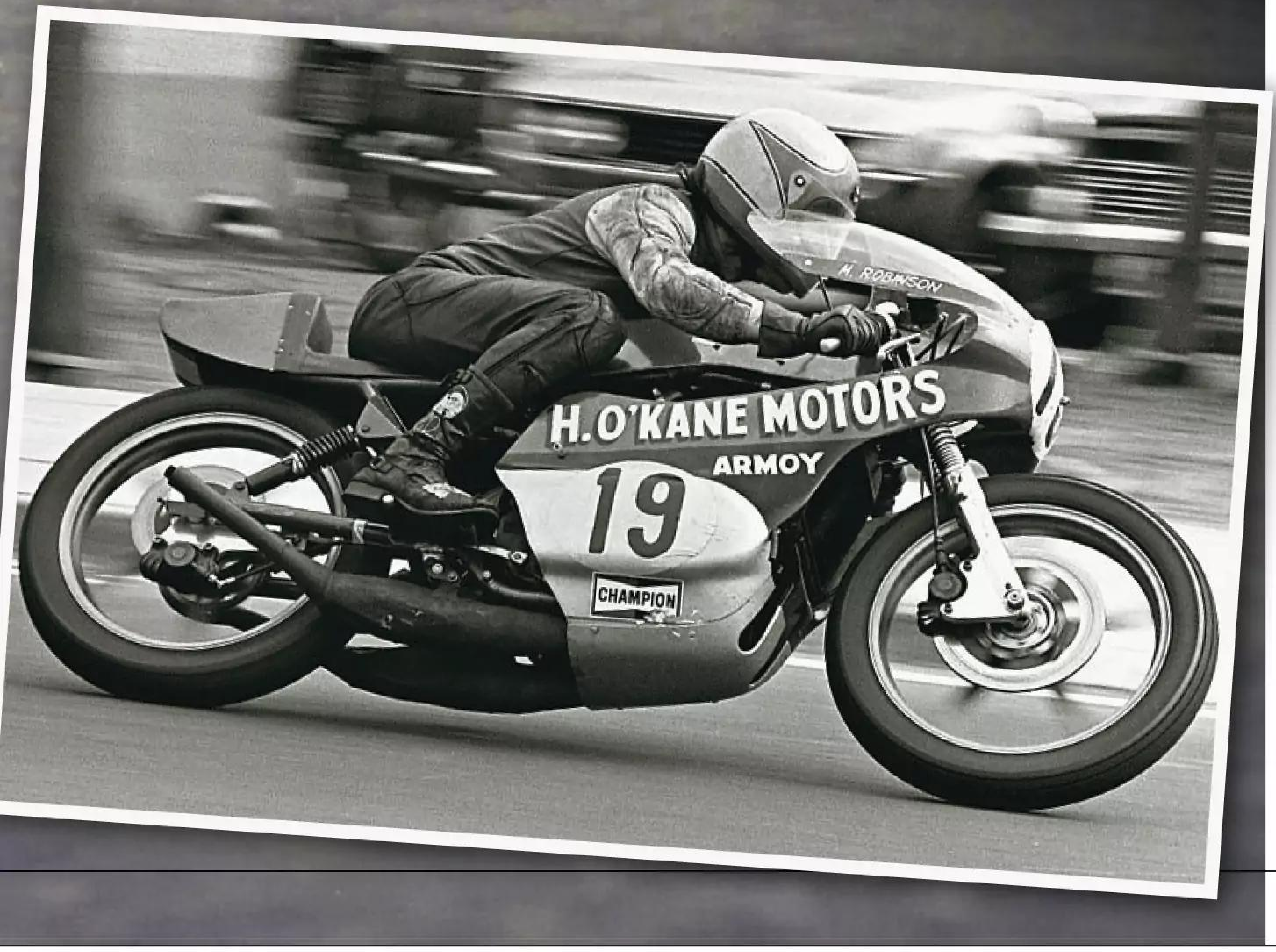
11
H. O'KANE MOTORS ARMOY

ABOVE: At the 1974 Jurby road-races.

LEFT: You couldn't keep a man like Merv down. Legend.

BELOW: In action during 1979.

Joey Dunlop, Frank Kennedy, Jim Dunlop and Mervyn Robinson.



memorable Embassy Championship final at Kirkistown, dicing with Joey Dunlop and eventual winner Ray McCullough.

During the close-season Robinson converted the twin-upright-shock Seeley frame to the new 'fashion' of steeply-angled (or lay-down) shocks, a short-lived concept to increase rear suspension travel which was made instantly obsolete by the introduction for 1976 of the cantilever/monoshock Yamaha TZ 'C' model.

He unfortunately received arm injuries at Aghadowey in early 1976, and his race results that year were mixed, some good, but signs that maybe he was trying a little too hard, with falls at the Skerries and Mondello Park, then a superb win at the Mid-Antrim 500cc race, but a broken con-rod at Carrowdore cost him any chance of the 500cc road racing championship. For the record, and probably over the winter of 1976/77, Robinson converted a second Seeley frame to a full cantilever, and was to race the two machines, both of which are still in existence.

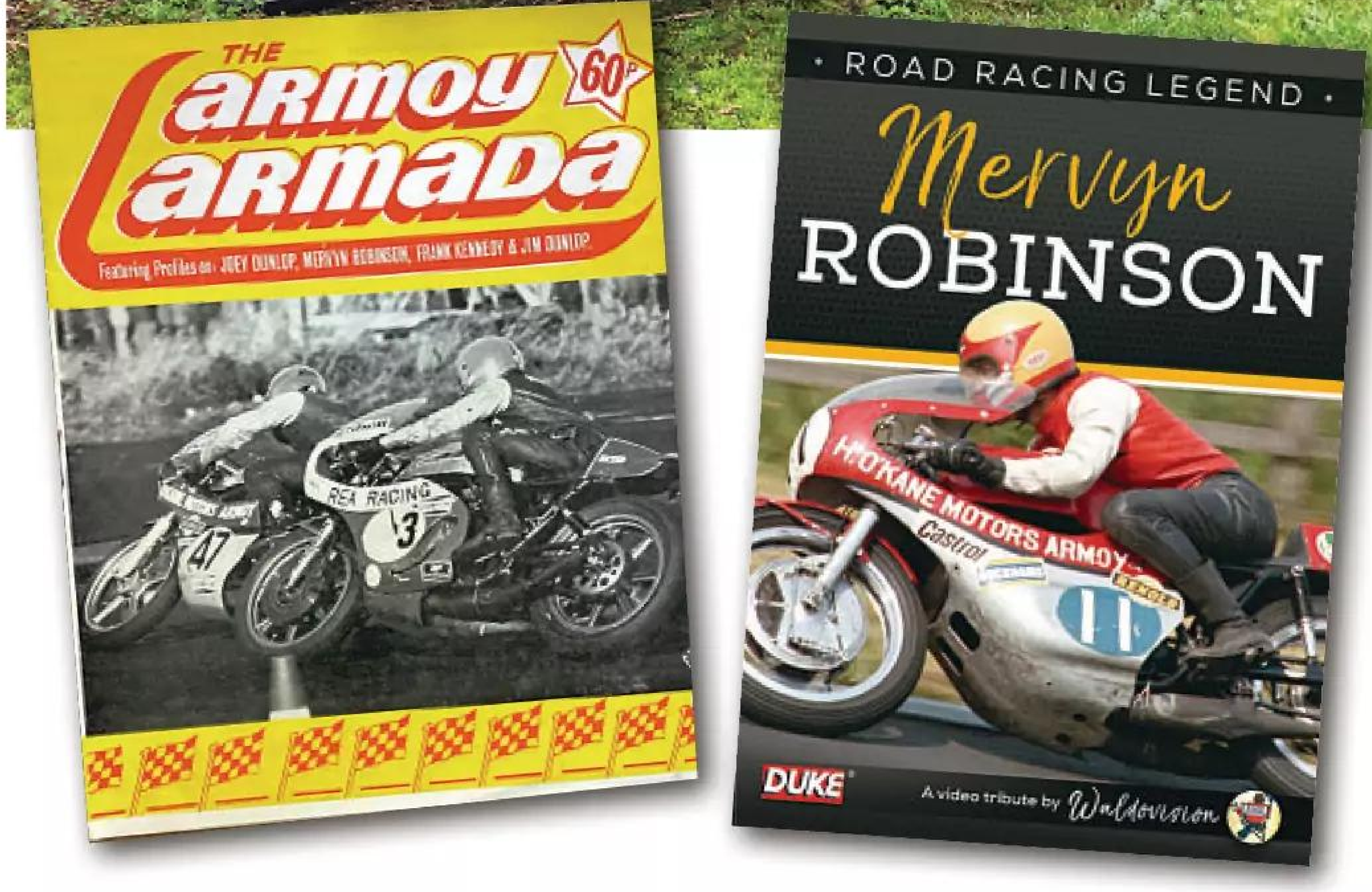
By the start of the 1977 season the talents of Joey Dunlop were obvious to all, and he was recognised as the main challenger to Ray McCullough, with Robinson running them close. Dunlop and McCullough shared the spoils at the season opener at Kirkistown, but a few days later at the St. Angelo circuit near Enniskillen, Dunlop clipped a course marker

H.O'KANE MOTORS ARMOY
9

Merv in pensive, pre-race mode.

CHAMPION
H.O'KANE MOTORS ARMOY
RENOLD
MICHELIN
STP

Nice that some of Merv's heritage is still around.


THE armoy armada 60p
Featuring Profiles on: JOEY DUNLOP, MERVYN ROBINSON, FRANK KENNEDY & JIM DUNLOP.
ROAD RACING LEGEND
Mervyn ROBINSON
DUKE
A video tribute by Waldovision

The Armoy Armada is still celebrated to this day, and (right) you can order this DVD.

whilst dicing with McCullough and ended up in hospital with an arm injury, where he joined brother-in-law Robinson who had crashed earlier in practice. For the latter it was a one-off ride on the Sam Taggart-sponsored Sparton usually ridden by Frank Kennedy which ended in a heavy fall and concussion that persisted for most of the rest of the season, and which is memorably portrayed on film in The Road Racers. He returned to racing in August to finish 7th in the Mid-Antrim 150 350cc race on the Rathkenny circuit, Ballymena, followed by 6th in the Embassy Championship final at Kirkistown, and on the 3rd of September a popular win in the 500cc class of the Carrowdore 100.

The 1978 season began well for Robinson with three wins at Mondello Park, but wins were becoming harder to gain due in part to the emergence of a new generation of riders coming through, the likes of Steven Cull, Graham Young, Noel Hudson, Con Law, Trevor Steele and Jim Dunlop joining the 'old guard.'

The Tandragee 100 was the opening race on the Ulster roads in 1979, and Robinson won the 500cc race on his 352 Yamsel, beating the 500cc Suzukis of Billy Guthrie and Frank Kennedy.

The North West 200 which followed will always be remembered for the tragic accidents to Tom Herron and Scotland's Brian Hamilton, and the three-rider accident that ended the careers of Warren Willing and Kevin Stowe, and left Frank Kennedy in a coma from which he never recovered, sadly passing away in November.

Robinson was deeply affected by the accidents but continued racing, and when the entries and programme for the following year's NW200 were made public he was unhappy to see that he had been allocated the riding number 31 for the 350cc and 500cc races, the same number that Frank Kennedy had for 1979. Not only that, Kennedy had been 31 when he died, and Robinson was 31 at the time of the 1980 NW200.

He was sufficiently bothered to formally request a reallocated number, and thought seriously about withdrawing when it was refused, but, ever the racer, he eventually agreed to ride. The crash happened at the fearsome Mather's Cross, a right-hand kink in the Coleraine-to-Portrush road, able to be taken virtually flat-in-top by a 350cc Yamaha (no chicane in 1980) by a brave and committed rider. It was thought at the time that a piston may have seized, and indeed a small pick-up was found during the post-accident machine examination, but that could have happened during the accident, and it was dismissed as not being the cause.

Hugh O'Kane has since spoken to an eye-witness who told him that as Robinson approached the corner, a travelling marshal situated at the corner began to move off. There was never any chance of a collision, but maybe just a slight visual distraction when a rider was already on the absolute limit could have been a factor. Even after having 'low-sided' the bike at tremendous speed, he nearly got away with it, as he slid with the bike, almost on top of it, until something on the bike dug in and threw him off.

Mervyn Robinson was a hard and determined rider, and had many accidents and 'moments' along the way, but this time the lucky black cat painted on his red-and-yellow helmet let him down (the black cat symbol was the result of an incident when illegally testing his race bike on the roads around Armoy, and a black cat crossing the road caused him to brake, just moments before a tractor and trailer emerged from a road-side field).

Watching the race from the trackside, thankfully not at Mather's Cross, was Robinson's five-year-old son Paul, who was to go on to become a top-level rider particularly in the 125cc class, and was to win that class of the 2010 NW200, later placing his winners laurels on his father's grave, in tribute. *CR*

- Mervyn Robinson ('Robo'). Died May 10 1980, Coleraine Hospital.

YAMSEL
REA RACING
3

The late William Dunlop, Gary Dunlop, David Wallace and Merv's boy, Paul Robinson.

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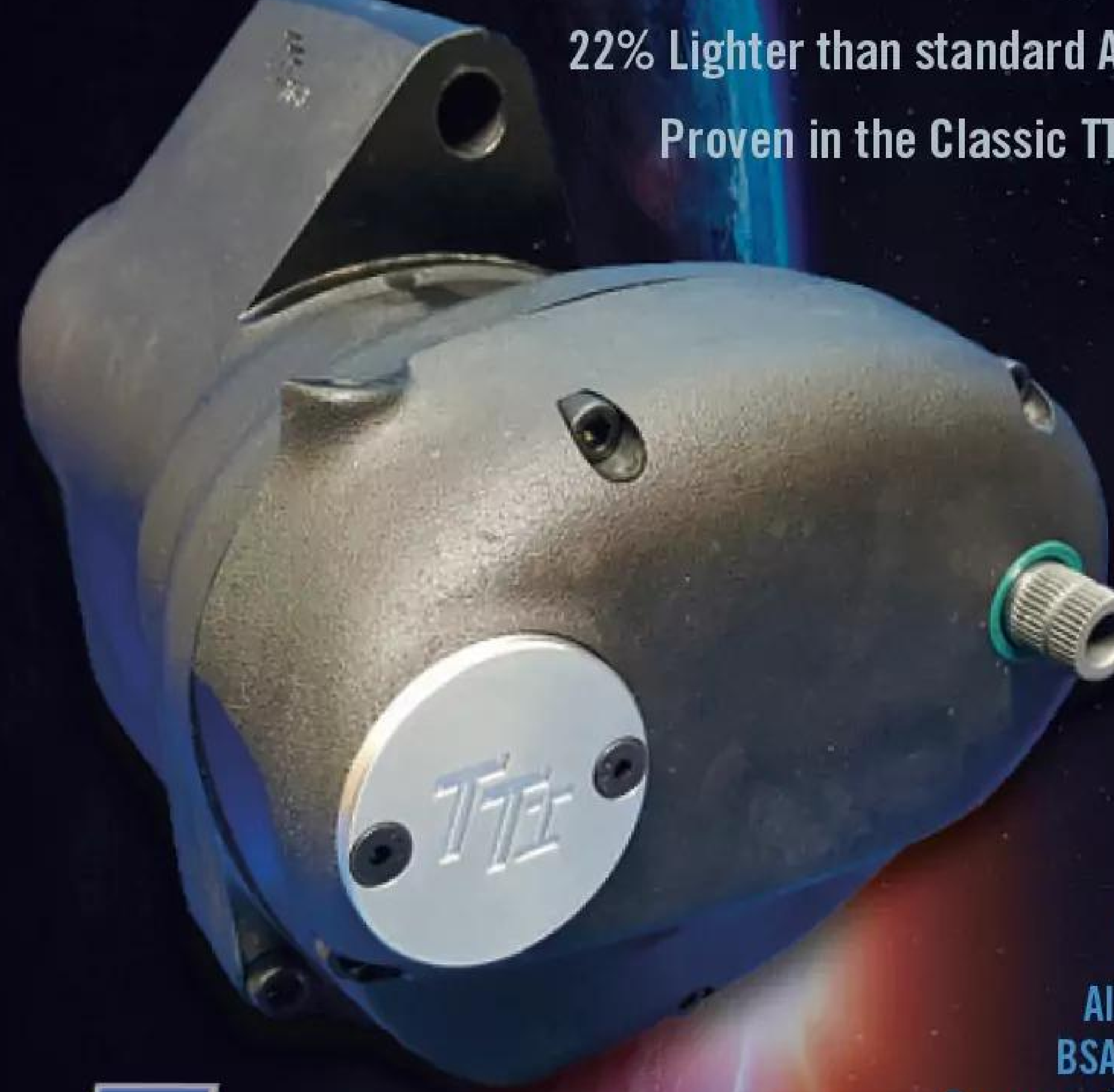

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NO MORE HEROES ANYMORE?

In this wrapped-up in cotton wool, namby-pamby, politically-correct world we live in, we make a stand for the bike racing heroes of old, their beautiful steeds and even the amazing battlefields upon which they entered combat… Oh, and apologies to The Stranglers!

Words: Geran van Mann **Photographs:** Mortons Archive, Don Morley/Hitchcocks Archives

We start with a warning: you MAY be offended by some of the views and opinions expressed in the next few pages of this feature.

However, we also think that – being of a certain age – you probably won't be and that we are actually speaking to the converted.

The title of this feature is pretty evocative: I'm saying that I'd rather watch old races than the modern stuff – even if I know what the result is going to be. I'd rather read about the old racers than the new ones and rather watch, see, ride and even smell the old bikes compared to the new ones. Oh, and ride and watch at the old tracks too. If you feel the same way, then I guess that's why you're reading this magazine right now.

When I dip my toe into the modern racing seen on the telly these days, I can see that the 'Bike Race Hero' is no more.

George Orwell opined that sport was 'war, minus the shooting' and yet if you watch today's motorcycle racing, you'll see that political correctness has indeed run riot. You'll see a pre-programmed automaton who can't even swear. You stick a microphone under a racer's nose pre or post-race, where fear, adrenalin and anxiety are in full flow and the interviewer has to apologise for them if they

First 500cc champ Les Graham: he flew Lancasters AND bikes!

1965 and Mike Hailwood has already crashed: but he'd go on to win!

swear! Please, stop apologising: we've heard worse down the pub.

Of course, some bike racers of old were gentlemen, they wouldn't swear and had taken part in a real war WITH the shooting. Our first world champion certainly was a hero. Acting Flight Lieutenant Robert Leslie 'Les' Graham – pilot of a Lancaster bomber – not only just took part in a high-risk raid on the U-boat pens in France, but he stayed behind with his crew of seven to photograph the damage done by him and his fellow squadron mates. 'Les' Graham received the Distinguished Flying Cross during the war for valour and after the war, in 1949, he would become the first 500cc World Champion ever and the first for Britain. Les wasn't just a hero and our first world champ: he was also remembered as being a mentor for the next generation of British bike race stars. A true gentleman indeed.

And it's not just wars that make bike race heroes. For many of us of a certain age we look to the likes of Geoff Duke, John Surtees Phil Read and Mike Hailwood.

Geoff won the 500cc title four times and was world champion six times. He once described how he'd use the kerbs and gutters at the Isle of Man TT course to stop the rear-end of the bike sliding… On a Manx Norton, that takes balls – am I allowed to still say that? Geoff once said: "In some ways it's a much easier life for modern riders. For example, they only race in one class whereas riders used to race in as many as three Grands Prix in a day. It's also much more financially rewarding for today's stars. But I can honestly say that I raced because I loved doing it, not because of what I was going to get paid. Money was a secondary thing for me. The main consideration was the thrill, the challenge, and the competitiveness of the racing itself. Personally, looking from then to now, I get the impression that there are fewer personalities in the sport now."

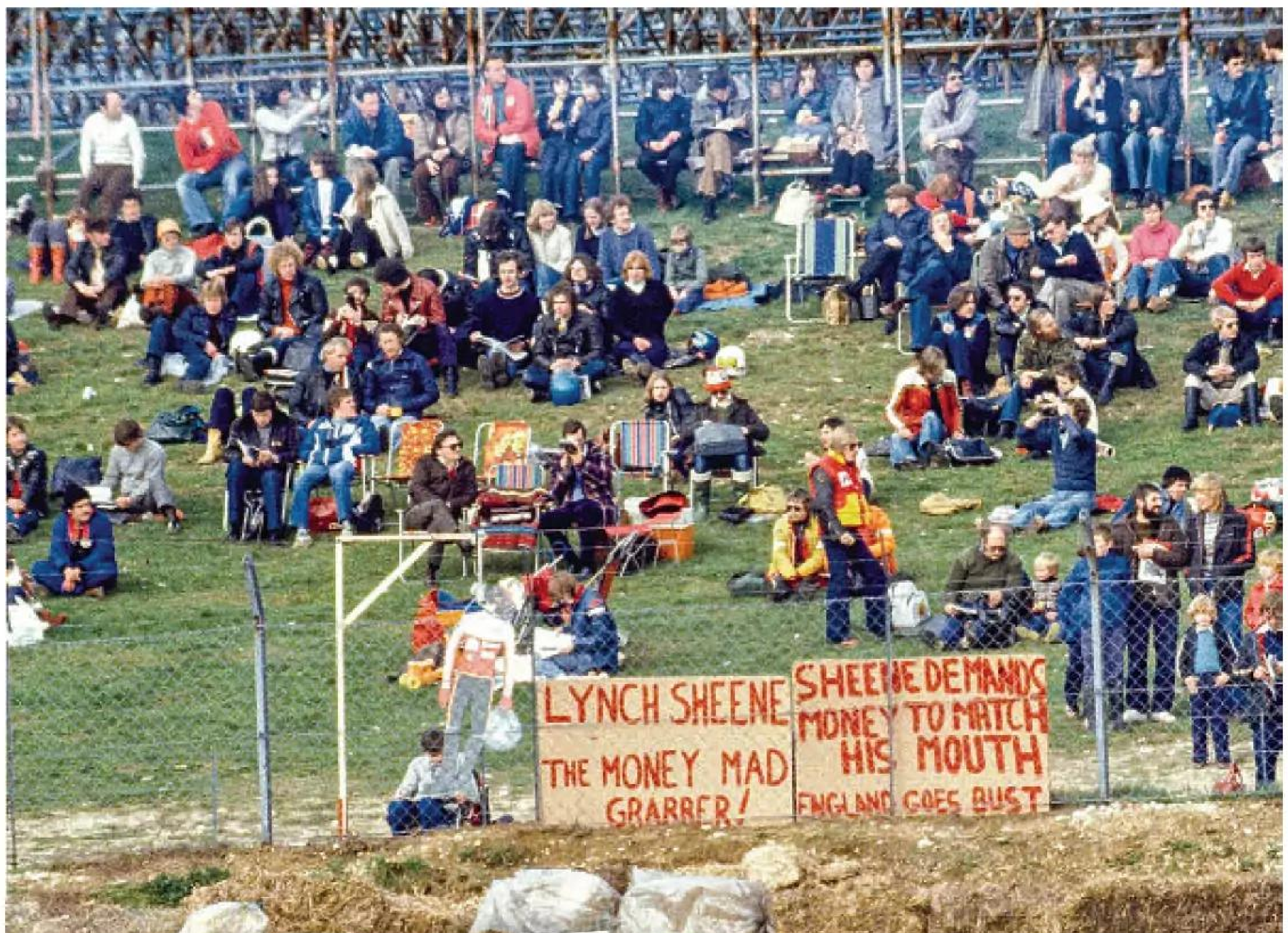
We agree! One of the biggest personalities was Mike 'The Bike' Hailwood. A colourful character and thought by many to be the 'Greatest of All Time' he truly bridged the gap between the quieter, more gentlemanly racers of Graham and Duke's era and the more brash ones like Barry Sheene and Steve Parrish.

Mike, too, showed his bravery. He won the George Medal in 1973 for rescuing fellow driver Clay Regazzoni from his flaming Formula 1 car. He also took victory in the 1965 TT, crossing the line on his battered MV Agusta with blood streaking his face following a crash after which he remounted to defeat Giacomo Agostini. And then to make that comeback in 1978 after more than a decade away from two-wheeled racing… Incredible!

Seventies excess!

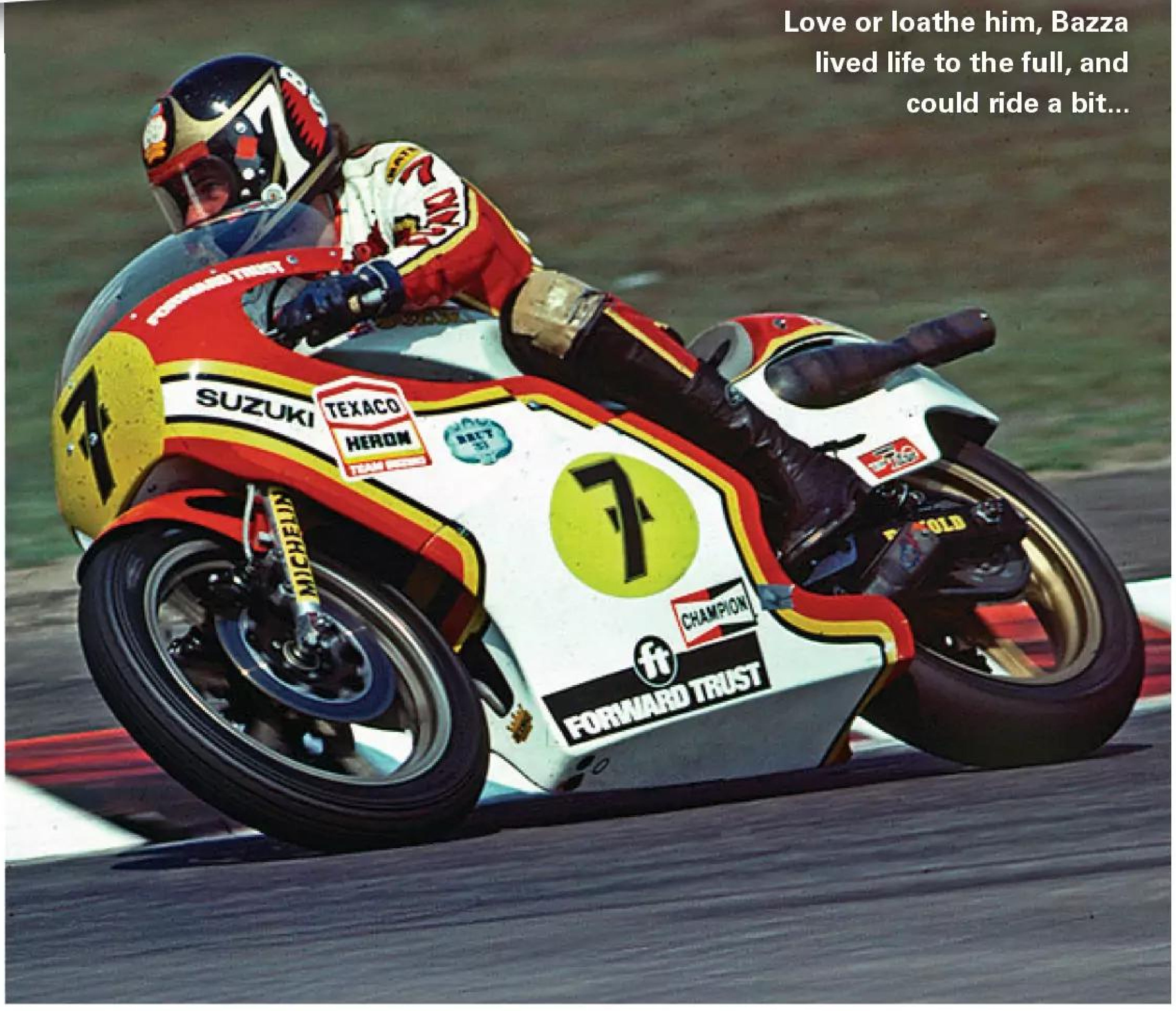
Barry Sheene and Steve Parrish once drove a Rolls-Royce courtesy car around the

Geoff Duke: for many, the man who set the template for the professional racer...



A 1980 bike race crowd: anti Sheene or what? Wouldn't see this today.

LEFT: Parrish the prankster. ABOVE: Roberts gunning for Sheene!



Love or loathe him, Bazza lived life to the full, and could ride a bit...

Nurburging and trashed it – just because! They blew up the 'below-par' toilets at the Finnish GP in Imatra in 1976 and were involved in countless shenanigans, most of which we could not repeat here in a magazine. Could you imagine brothers Marc and Alex Marquez today doing the same? Nah…

We also have it on good authority that Bazza was once interviewed in bed, in his caravan by the legendary road-race reporter John Brown, with a female 'associate' hiding underneath the sheets… Just another day in the life of a 1970s motorcycle racer.

People like Sheene and Parrish lived life to the full in a time when – let's be frank – motorcycle racing had a shockingly poor 'health and safety' record. So, there has been one improvement even if the 'personality' quota seems a bit low. "There are definitely fewer personalities in the sport now because the riders aren't given any chance to become a personality," says Steve Parrish. "They're put on a motorbike at the age of five or six and they're sheltered from the real world, spending their teenage years down the gym or on a racetrack when most teenagers are mucking about. It's not normal. I'm going to start a reverse training school for MotoGP riders so that they learn to muck about a bit more! Send them to me for a couple of months. That'll sort them out."

Of course, today's racers – while maintaining a healthy rivalry – aren't supposed to 'hate' each other either, right? If you were into MotoGP a decade ago, you'll have noticed the rivalry between Marc Marquez and Valentino Rossi in the battle for the 2015 title. This year it was still simmering as Ducati team boss Davide Tardozzi was shouting at the passionate Italian fans at their home Grand Prix as they were booing Spaniard Marquez…

In our day things were always on the boil! Barry Sheene: "Kenny Roberts couldn't develop a cold, let alone a motorcycle…" Then Kenny would shoot back: "The sole reason I get up in the morning is to beat Barry Sheene." Oh, and didn't it add to the racing! 1979 British Grand Prix at Silverstone anyone? And you could see the mutual respect behind the banter and the flicking of the 'vees' at the end of the race. Marvellous stuff!

While most of us loved Barry, some fans hated him too, so such feelings aren't a modern thing. Many Isle of Man fans still to this day dislike him following on from his 'anti' IoM comments following his one and only visit there in 1971.

And do you recall March 1980? Barry was going to miss that year's Transatlantic Match Races in a row over start money with the owners of some of the circuits – Motor Circuit Developments (they owned Brands Hatch, Mallory Park, Oulton Park and Snetterton.) Apparently, the money didn't match what he was getting from Cadwell Park and Donington Park.

Finally, a settlement was reached (allegedly £20,000 for the three races) with some going to The Joan Seeley Cancer Fund. Barry could only get a best of 4th in the races and ninth in the overall points. The Yanks won! Meanwhile, some of the fans weren't impressed and bought some rather unflattering banners. Check out the picture and the signs: imagine if you had a gallows with a rider's neck in the noose today? You'd be frog-marched off the premises… All part of the fun, back in the day.

Heading into the 1980s we still had our superstars who spoke as they found and did their own thing… People like Roger Marshall (our 'Reg' liked a pint or three), Mick Grant and Joey Dunlop. Yer Maun was a hero alright. Especially to a generation of kids who grew up in the orphanages that he'd take much-needed supplies to. Legend.

Even Americans have a sense of humour!

Now, what about our colonial cousins? We've seen that Kenny Roberts had a great sense of humour, so did most of his countrymen who followed him in bike racing.

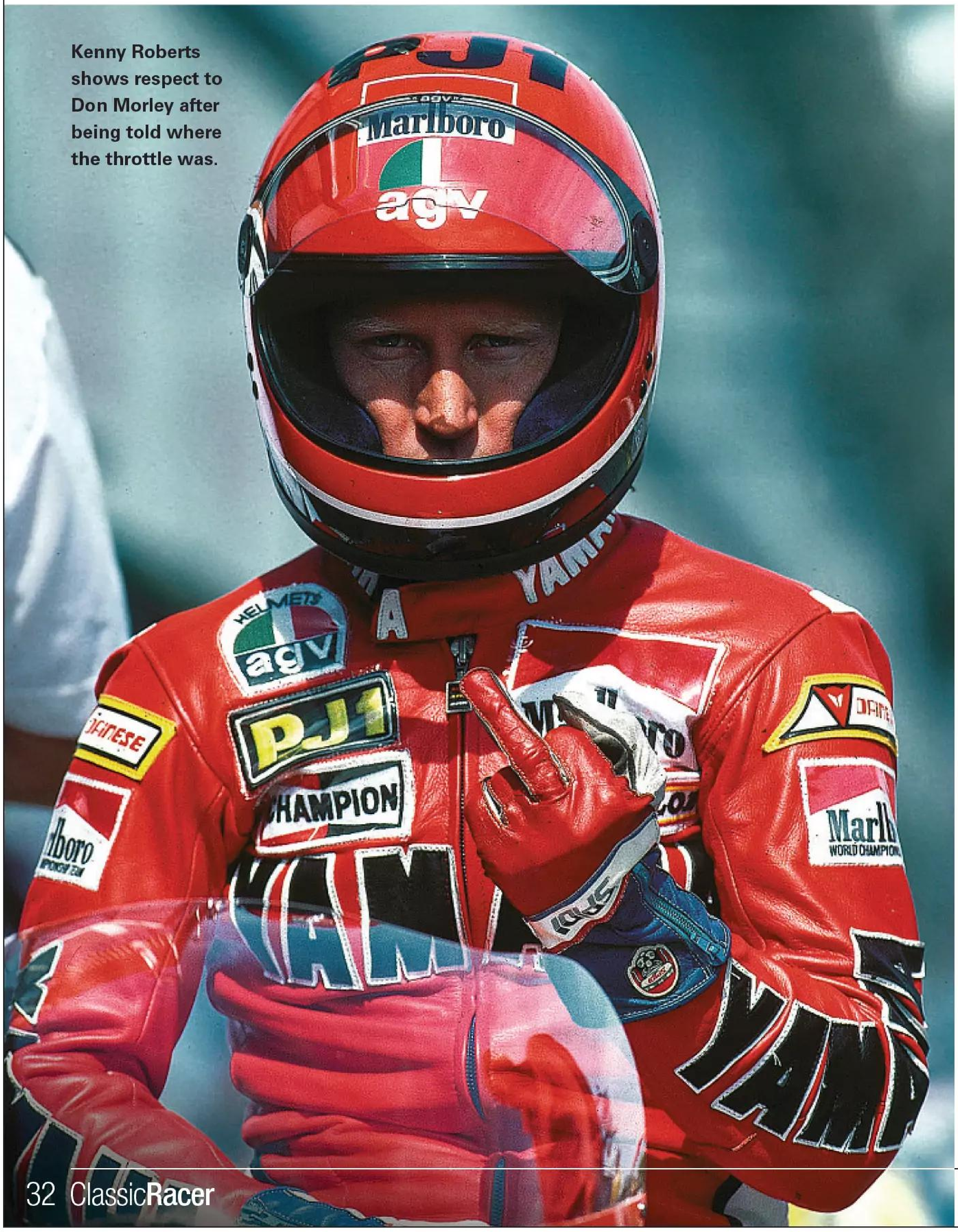
Remember Eddie Lawson's laconic humour? He was never a big fan of the razzamatazz of racing, nor the press conferences. Outside his motorhome, journalists about to knock on the door couldn't miss the 'welcome' mat with 'F**K OFF, GO AWAY!' on it.

Then there's this quip. When seeing rival Freddie Spencer being interviewed post-race, saying that he lost the race because he hit a straw bale marking part of the track, Eddie butts in with: "It was also possible to MISS the bale…"

Wayne Rainey and Kevin Schwantz had a sizzling rivalry which kept us on the edge of our seats in the 1980s into the 1990s. 1991 was a high point in their battles. In a race at Hockenheim, Schwantz left a 200-metre skid mark when he locked the rear and then the front as he passed Rainey going into the Sachscurve and the stadium section on the last lap to take a memorable win. When asked about how he could brake so hard and for so long and stay upright, Schwantz simply shrugged and said: "See God, then back off…"

Four weeks later and it's Assen. Wayne makes a mistake, running off the track just 100 yards from victory, which Kevin duly snatches from him. In the post-race press conference a journalist asks Wayne what went wrong? Schwantz recalls: "Before Wayne can answer, I grab the microphone and say; 'I'll tell you what went wrong, the same thing that went wrong for him a month ago at Hockenheim – I beat him.' Man, Wayne was so pissed off. I was sure he was going to go toe-to-toe to me right

Doubtless one of Niall Mackenzie's 'grid girls!' Wouldn't be allowed now. Which is good... Ha!



Kenny Roberts shows respect to Don Morley after being told where the throttle was.

An actual shot of one of Steve Plater's many scars...

then. He was so angry, furious. I'd never seen him that bad before, but I wanted to wind him up more. Racing needs that needle between racers. And with me and Wayne it started years before in the USA, and then at the Trans-Atlantic Match Races (the Brands Hatch round in 1987 was one hell of a shit-fight between us…) and it carried on in GPs. Wanna know the end of that story? Well, I will bet you now, that on that very night we still met up together and downed a few beers…"

Even in recent years Kevin has always been quick with a quote. This story comes from Valentino Rossi's hey-day. It's the Barcelona race and there's Schwantz, Rainey, Mick Doohan, Rossi and Alex Criville – the 1999 500cc champ – in a press conference. Someone asks: "If you were all racing today who would win?" Kevin takes up the story: "Wayne and Mick are both going 'hmmm' and 'ahhhh' thinking what would be best to say, when I just wade in with my answer: 'I've no idea who would win, but Valentino would be 4th at best…' The day after Rossi rode a brilliant race and won. I was impressed, so I cut him some slack. I went up to him after the press conference and said; 'Okay Valentino, maybe you could sneak a 3rd…'"

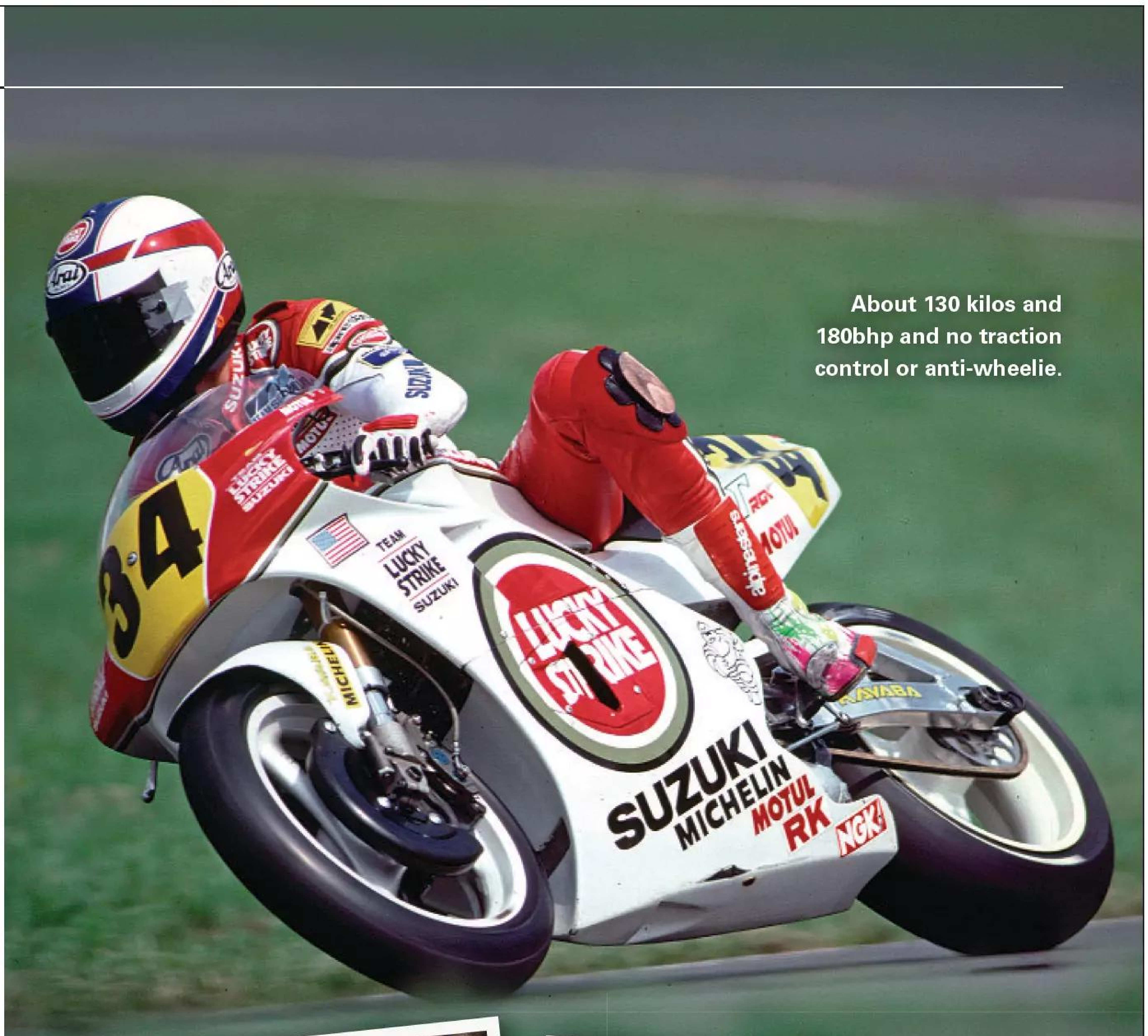
Through the pain barrier…

Sadly, the downside of racing motorcycles is that – if you fall off – you can hurt yourself.

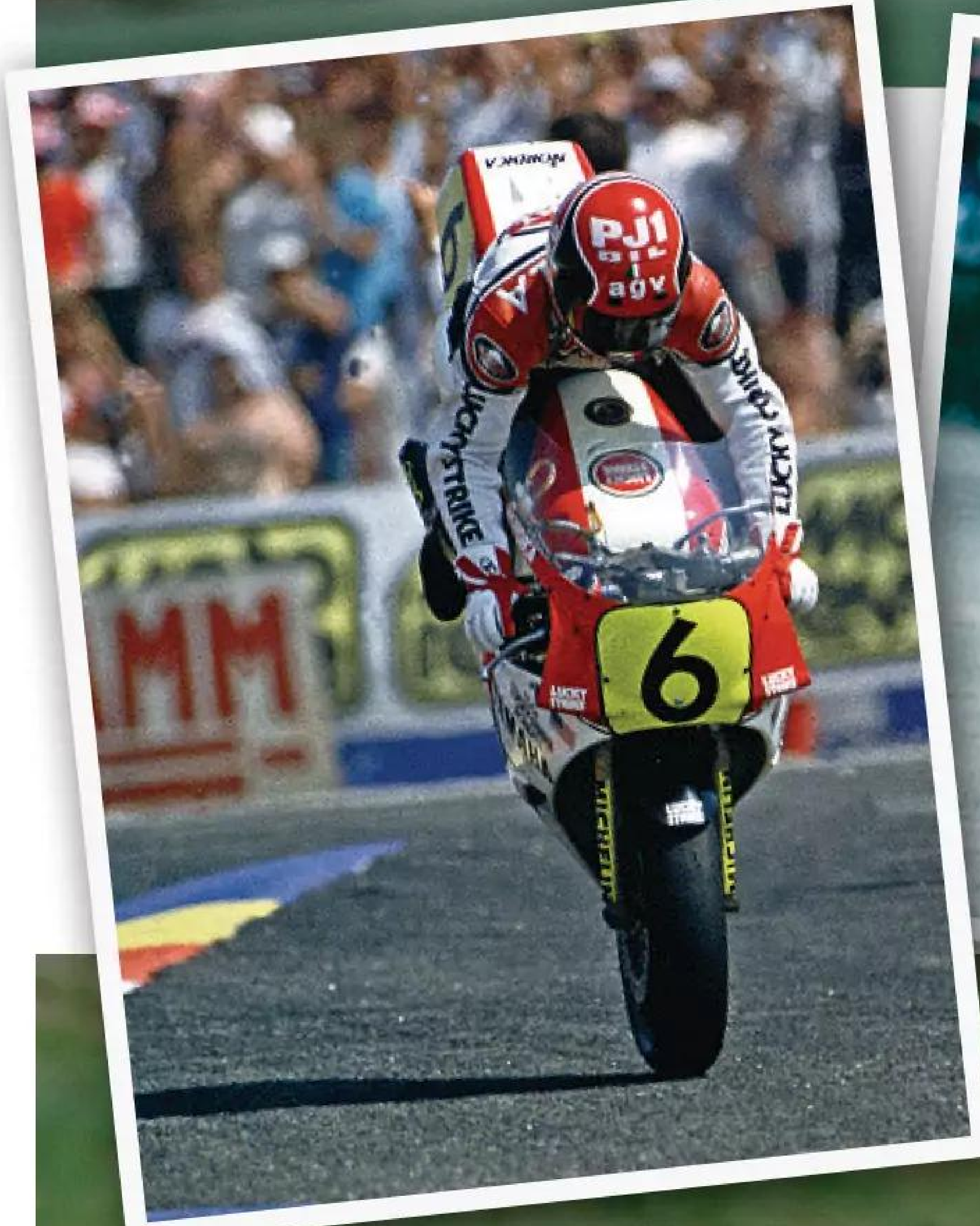
Here is where I'm praising the modern motorcycle bike kit. The air-bag leather suits and bike kit really is top notch. Instead, my target is that car racers really don't know that they've got it made. Often sitting in a tin box full of protection.

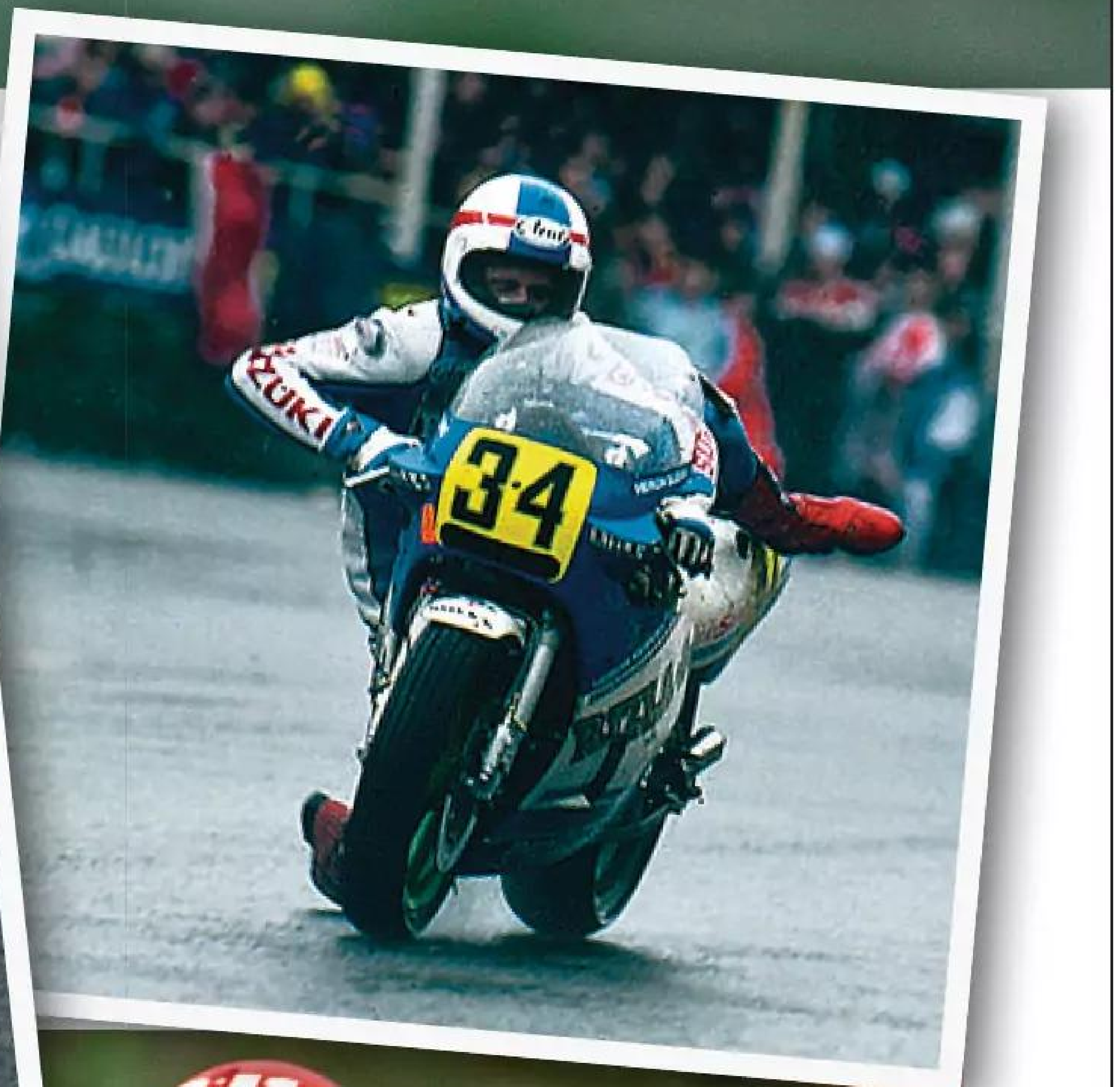
Back in the day, bike racers would often come back from injury – perhaps way too soon, compared to a car racer. I recall in 1999 when Michael Schumacher crashed at Silverstone and broke his leg, he was out for more than three months – in comparison even modern MotoGP racers are seen hobbling about on crutches just weeks later. Whether that's a good idea or not, I guess depends if you're a doctor and what you have planned for your retirement…

And it has to be said – racing with injuries can lead to safety issues on track with other riders. Steve Plater says: "In 2001 at Silverstone I had a high-side and broke my right foot and left wrist. A week later I'm riding at Snetterton, I cut the cast off but in qualifying I have another accident – this one not my fault. I'm lying in Norwich hospital and the doctor comes over and says: 'I'm afraid you've broken your wrist and foot, Mr Plater.' I explained that I'd actually done those two bones the week previously and asked was there anything else broken as I wanted to get back to the track. Three years later I broke my right wrist but had nerve damage and couldn't feel four of my five fingers. The little pinkie on that hand was the only one I could feel. So, I could brake but had no idea how much pressure I was putting on the lever, until I had a brain-wave. I had the fingers on the right glove stitched together so the little finger could feel the amount of pressure I was putting on the lever. Result."



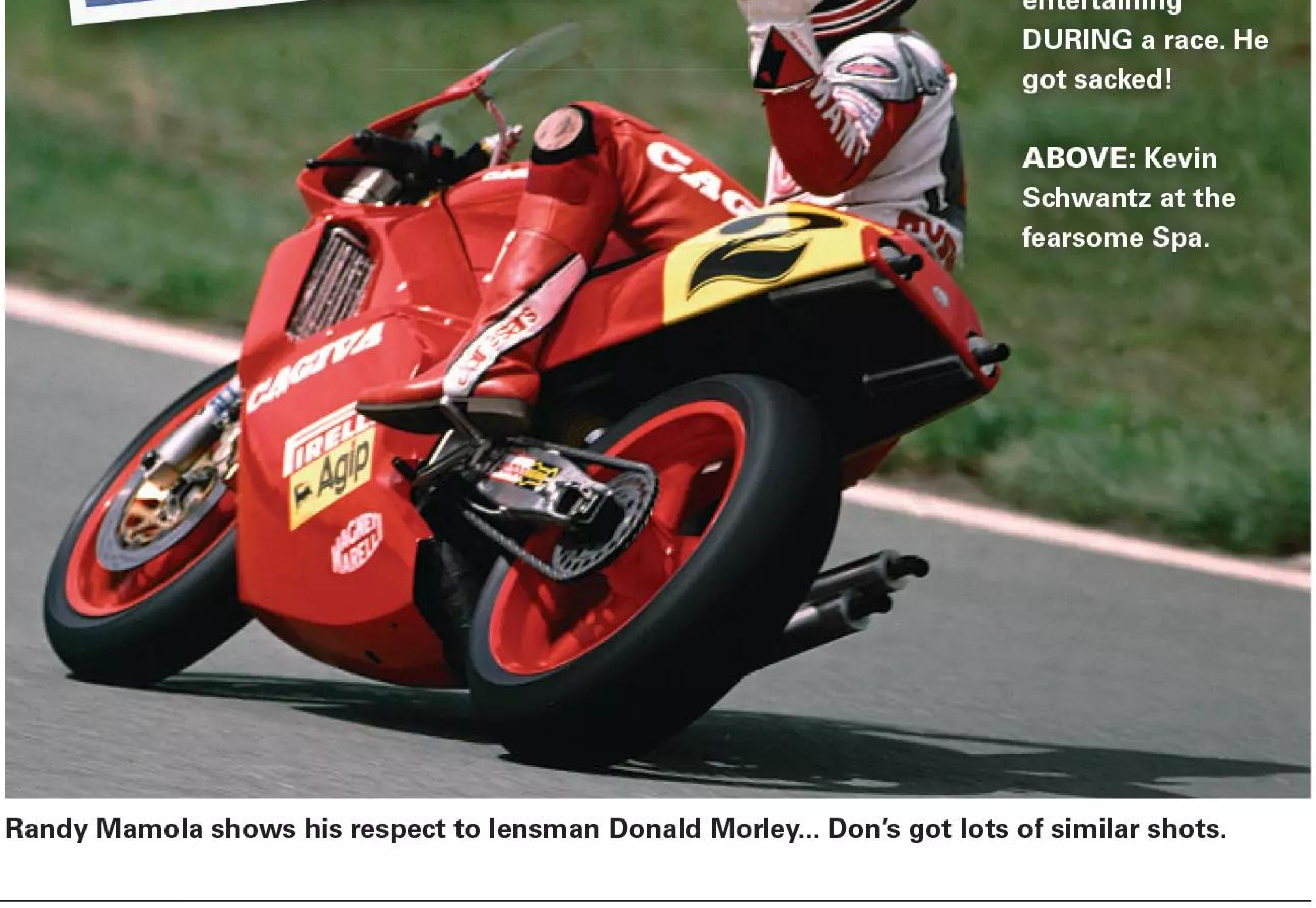
About 130 kilos and 180bhp and no traction control or anti-wheelie.





ABOVE LEFT: Randy Mamola entertaining DURING a race. He got sacked!

ABOVE: Kevin Schwantz at the fearsome Spa.



Randy Mamola shows his respect to lensman Donald Morley... Don's got lots of similar shots.

Steve's always been mad. Nice mad, though…

Many bike racers can lay claim to 'could have, should have' won more titles if they hadn't gotten injured or ridden injured. Fair play to two Aussies who often battled through the pain barrier: Wayne Gardner and Mick Doohan.

Wayne was often riding injured and maybe he could have added to his 1987 500cc title. Meanwhile Mick was on his way to the 1992 title on his NSR500 before he went to Assen and broke his right leg. Things got so bad amputation was considered. He eventually fought back to win five back-to-back 500cc titles from 1994-1998. Teak tough, that bloke…

Vanilla race circuits…

And here's another thing that pees me off in today's world. Heroes also need battlegrounds that befit them. Places in which to be heroic. This means Monza, Hockenheim, Brands Hatch, Laguna Seca, Assen, Mugello and yes, the Isle of Man.

Today's international tracks all seem to be designed by that fella Hermann Tilke. Despite being a former racer himself, he did the likes of Sepang, Circuit of the Americas and Istanbul to name but a few. Thoroughly forgettable circuits one and all. Remember that 500cc Grand Prix race at Hockenheim in 1991? Or the race there in 1996 in World Superbikes? Monza races with slipstreaming battles and more. Great tracks make great battles… not the sterile races we see today.

Some years ago, Geoff Duke said: "There is a 'sameness' about all the circuits that I find dull. There's so much run-off that a rider can afford to ride near the limit in the knowledge that if he does fall off he's probably not going to hurt himself. I never had that luxury."

Heroes like Wayne Rainey talk about the great circuits with affection – as scary as they can be in certain conditions. Wayne says: "In 1990 at Spa Francorchamps you would go from the racing part of the track back onto the public road and it was raining so hard that the dips in the road made from heavy trucks would be wet and I would go across them with the bike going 'whaaa-whaaa-whaaa' hydroplaning – you'd be dancing across the water in sixth gear at 170mph. It was perfect. Sometimes you and the bike would have such confidence and it would almost be scary. You could maybe lose the bike at any time, but I looked forward to that part of every lap at Spa that year." People like Wayne are made of different stuff. I panic doing 30mph over a mildly damp manhole cover. In the car…

A great quote about tracks came from James Whitham recently, from a British Superbike race at Cadwell Park where he said: "There are so many ups and downs and nuances to Cadwell that you really couldn't design a racetrack like this on a drawing board if you tried. I've heard it said that Cadwell wasn't so much designed as they sent off a drunk man on a Tarmac laying machine…"

Yes… we love our tracks designed by God and not by committee with a tablet with CAD software on it…

The bikes

Okay, we need to talk now about a discrepancy between some of the modern bikes we have on the British tracks we love. The superbikes have surely out-grown the likes of Cadwell, Oulton and Brands – to a degree. I don't want to dwell on any recent incidents, but it's enough to say that the amount of stoppages during British Superbike meetings means we'll soon see Doha-style flood-lighting the norm.

And while we're on about BSB machines, let's please go back to rules that perhaps follow World Superbikes. Remember our great wild-card rides and winners of 20-30 years ago? We don't/can't see that now and our British riders are leaving our shores ill-prepared for international race series, be it four-stroke production (WSB) or prototype (MotoGP/Moto2.)

So, bikes. I know we'll never see their like

DUNLOP
TEXACO

BELOW: The original Nurburgring 1978.

RIGHT: Terry Haslam leads Mick Boddice, Cadwell 1976.

CADWEL
PARK

Laguna Seca back in 1977: there's a reason why it disappeared from MotoGP. No run-off!

Spa in the late 1970s.

Eddie Lawson: four titles on two manufacturers. Took zero BS...

again, but – oh, 500cc, 250cc and 125cc two-strokes and the booming four-strokes of old and even proddie-based racers. We see some of them out there at parades and the like, but I for one miss them. Do modern bikes flatter?

Martyn Ogborne is a legend. He spannered for Sheene during his glory years and was a friend of Mike Hailwood, Giacomo Agostini, Kenny Roberts, Randy Mamola and many of the greats. Hailwood actually admitted to 'Oggie' that the bikes themselves were so good in 1978 and 1979 for his comeback races that they flattered him, in a way. "Mike and I discussed it and the under-tyred, under-suspended bikes he was riding with 80bhp in the 1960s were a world away from the 115bhp RG500 that he had later, so it stands to reason that the improvements since have been even more pronounced."

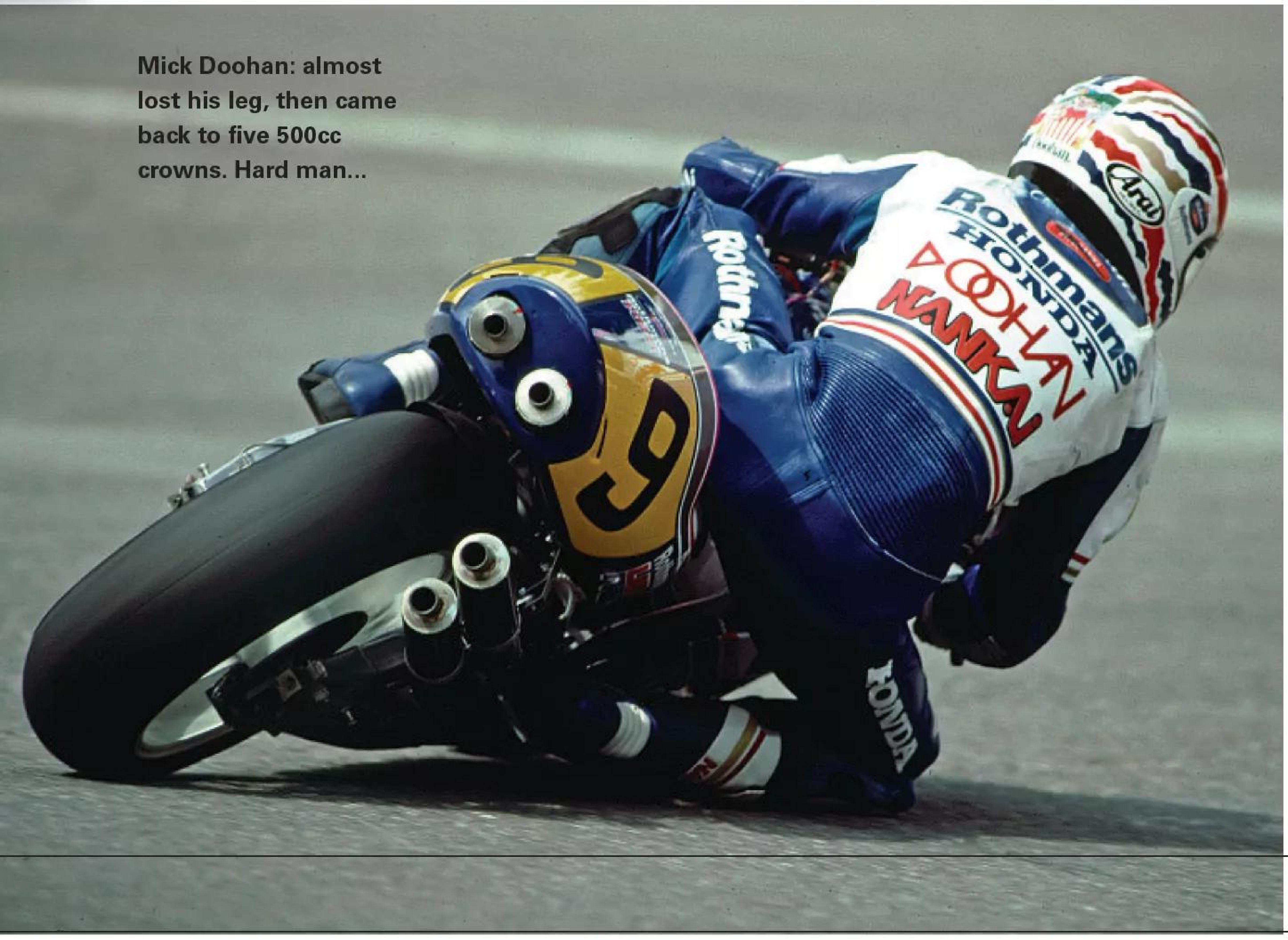
Schwantz would agree. While the 1993 500cc GP champ only started out road-racing in 1984, he got to Grands Prixs in 1986 and retired in 1995. He knows the difference between the screaming two-strokes and the more user-friendly tractable four-strokes.

He says: "I'm lucky, as I managed to ride all the 2007 MotoGP bikes at the end of that season. The four-stroke bikes are easier to ride – no question. I was there at Valencia doing 1m 35s or 36s, and the current guys are doing 31s and 32s. I was four or five seconds off the pace, but those bikes have so much torque and power you can do that. On a 500, if you're three or four seconds off the pace you'll find that you can hardly ride it as the gearbox ratios will be way out as you've got maybe 2500-3000rpm as your powerband and the bike will be geared for that. Those MotoGP bikes may have around 250bhp, but the trick for many modern riders is being able to trust the electronics to do the job and not spit them off. In my day we just got spat off…"

It's no wonder that 2027 will see MotoGP move away from the tech-heavy rules currently seen in the premier class. It needs it. I for one will never forget the 160-180bhp two-stroke V4 500cc machines. Evil and with zero electronics.

Where I will grudgingly admit something is that – say, in 1975 – riders in the 500cc class faced a 12-round series. One of which was on the TT course – for the penultimate time. Today MotoGP riders have 22 events including Saturday's sprint race.

So, my rant is at an end. What do you all think? Are today's racers different or are they still cut from the same cloth? Have a good moan at the editor and tell him what you think. Let him cop the flak! CR



Mick Doohan: almost lost his leg, then came back to five 500cc crowns. Hard man...

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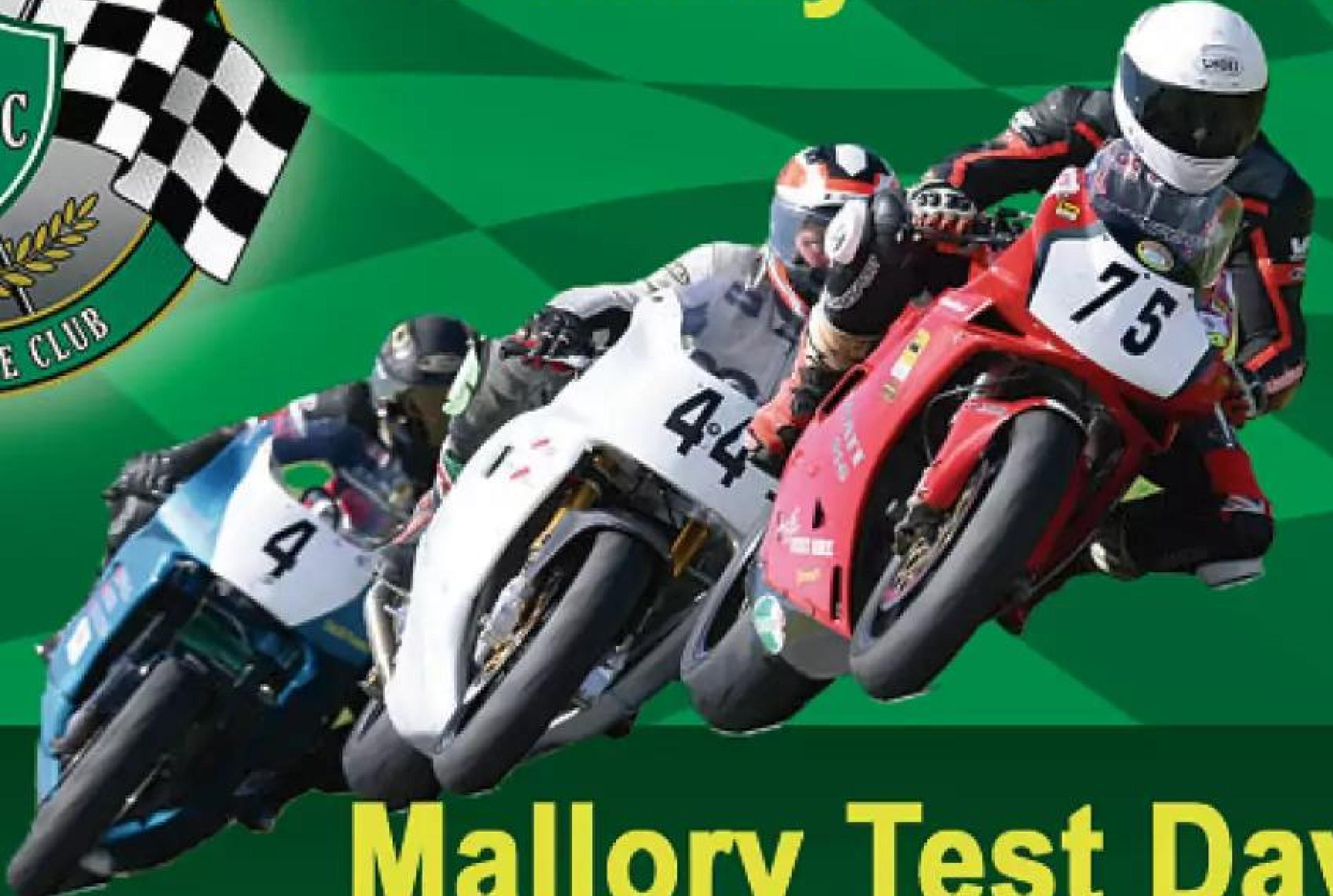

2026 Calendar

8 March Mallory Park Test Day
4 - 5 April Cadwell Park
2 - 3 May Pembrey
30 - 31 May Snetterton 200
4 - 5 July Brands Hatch Indy
1 - 2 Aug Donington Park National
29 - 30 Aug Anglesey Coastal
19 - 20 Sept Mallory Park

Mallory Test Day
8th March
★ Competitor Training Course
★ Basic Rider Assessment
★ Machine Test Sessions

All Race Meetings
★ 4 DVLA Licence Parades
★ 4 Race Weekend per Class

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MILLENNIUM MARV

After the best part of a decade as the also-ran of the 500cc V4 class, the smallest Japanese factory race team finally came good once more. Alan Cathcart rides Kenny Roberts Jnr's 2000 title-winning Suzuki RGV500 XR89.

Words: Alan Cathcart **Photographs:** Paul Barshon

A mission accomplished. After winning four GP races and finishing second overall in the final 500GP World Championship of the last millennium, with a bike which had been the surprise package of the 1999 season, Kenny Roberts Jnr and the RGV500 Suzuki XR89 went one better in 2000.

KR Jnr clinched the World title two races early after again winning four races in the 16-race season – one more than anyone else – and scoring more points in more races than anyone, too, with a single DNF at Assen after the engine seized when he was seemingly set for a fifth victory. A total of four pole positions, nine rostrum finishes and three fastest laps stamped King Kenny II and the XR89 as the dominant force in Y2K 500GP racing, ahead of Valentino Rossi in his Honda 500GP debut season. This came after the Suzuki rider took the points lead in the third race of the season in Japan, and held it for the rest of the year, despite an obvious horsepower deficiency on the part of the RGV500 Suzuki's twin-crank

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Sir Al enjoys the XR69 around Phillip Island...

Junior wearing the number one plate in 2001: it would be a difficult championship defence.

engine that Kenny was especially vocal about all year long. It just meant he had to work a little harder to succeed his dad as master of the 500GP universe, exactly 20 years on after KR Snr scored the last of his trio of World titles for Yamaha...

The chance to test the newly crowned 500cc World champion's bike at Phillip Island two days after the season-ending Australian GP, came almost exactly one year to the day after I'd last ridden the RGV500 Suzuki in XR89 guise at Jerez – a tighter track than the fast, daunting down under circuit. In Spain, I'd discovered the bike's crucial advantage: its sweet steering and refined handling, in turn the product of the effective three-way collaboration between rider Roberts, the Suzuki design staff back home in Hamamatsu, and Aussie race engineer and former top rider Warren Willing (see boxout) which endowed the XR89 chassis with a level of balance and refinement that set it apart from its rivals.

However, the ability to cut inside the opposition and hold a tight line in a slower bend that I discovered at Jerez was one thing – but the fast, flowing Phillip Island track

Brembo and Ohlins front-end dominated by large carbon engine air-scoops.

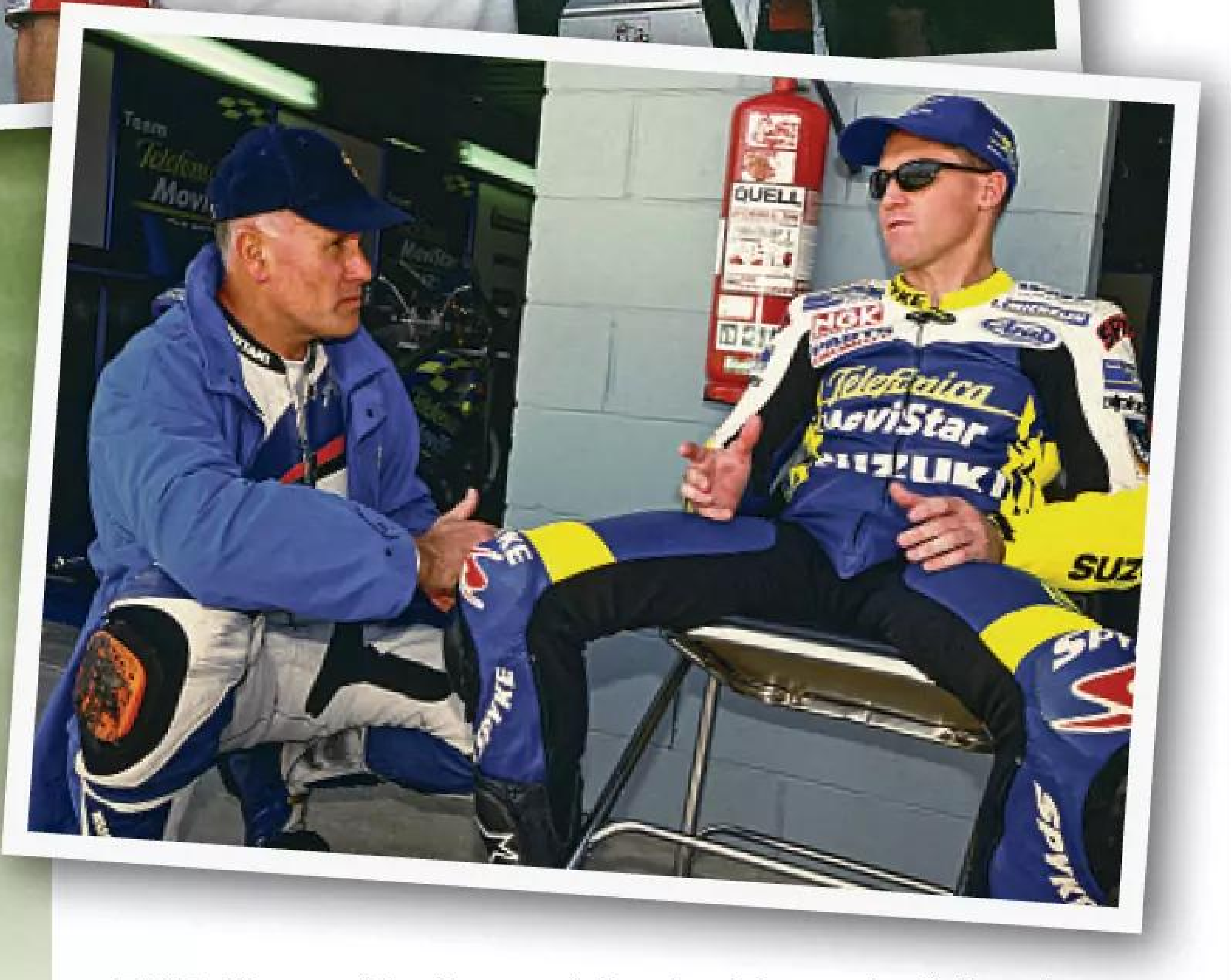
posed a different kind of question: was the Suzuki's agility and poise in changing direction in tight turns only obtained at the cost of high speed instability, which might compromise its performance on faster tracks? Twenty-five laps of the Island later, I had my answer – as well as a vivid lesson in the phenomenal levels of skill needed to ride a final evolution 500GP two-stroke round a high-speed circuit like this at competitive speeds.

Whereas in the past when testing factory superbikes at Phillip Island I'd always been able to get on the pace reasonably quickly, and cut a qualifying time for the World Superbike race held at the same circuit, I'll readily hold my hand up and admit that trying to do the same thing with the lighter, equally powerful and infinitely better braked RGV500 Suzuki presented a much steeper learning curve, that took some time to even attempt to master.

Mind you, I was in good company, alongside Suzuki's former 500GP World champion, maestro Kevin Schwantz, having his first outing on a 500 of any kind for five years and lapping a 'mere' seven seconds off the lap times being carved out by King Kenny II and his new Spanish team-mate Sete Gibernau.

It wasn't for want of trying, though – and coming to our aid in redressing the balance even slightly were the Suzuki's established attributes of its balanced chassis set-up, precise steering and high corner speed. Well, once you've programmed your brain to convince yourself that what seems like a suicidally fast entry speed for Siberia on a bike I'd already laid a darkie on out of Honda Corner, really was the right and proper way to ride the

Y2K GP bike vintage cockpit is sparse.



TOP: Kenny Senior and Junior. The only father/son to win the 500cc championship. ABOVE: Alan gets the low-down on the RGV from KRJR.

Sete Gibernau would join Suzuki in 2001 and he rode at the Phillip Island test too.

more-or-less guided missile that a 500GP two-stroke represented.

The difference to a superbike was all in the weight – or, strictly speaking, in the power-to-weight ratio, meaning that everything seemed to happen that much faster, even if the two very different kinds of bikes were then level-pegging for the outright lap record around the Australian GP circuit. On a 162kg Superbike I at least had the impression of being more or less in charge, able to use the kinder if no less potent power delivery of its four-stroke engine in something approaching anger, and above all to employ its more controllable combination of engine braking and metal discs with more assurance when stopping from high speed, compared to the 132kg stroker's all-or-nothing carbon composite brakes, and minimal engine braking.

But on the RGV500, even though its 185mph-plus top speed was actually slower than several factory Superbikes, it just got there that much quicker, and in doing so made it even more crucial to pick exactly the right line practically instinctively through the successive fast bends abounding at Phillip Island, because the optimum line got dramatically narrowed so fast under such explosive acceleration, so you had that much less time, let alone room, to make corrections.

I had a good illustration of that one lap climbing away from Siberia, when – thanks to the Suzuki's excellent traction even on the angle – I got such a good drive out of the world's most southerly race-track turn that I missed my cut-off point into the next right hander at Hayshed and went in too deep, which in turn put me wrong for all the rest of the hill up to Lukey Heights. There, I was effortlessly out-braked by Kenny Roberts himself – complete with pitying shake of the head, before he gave me a master-class in how to stop for the downhill MG hairpin immediately after.

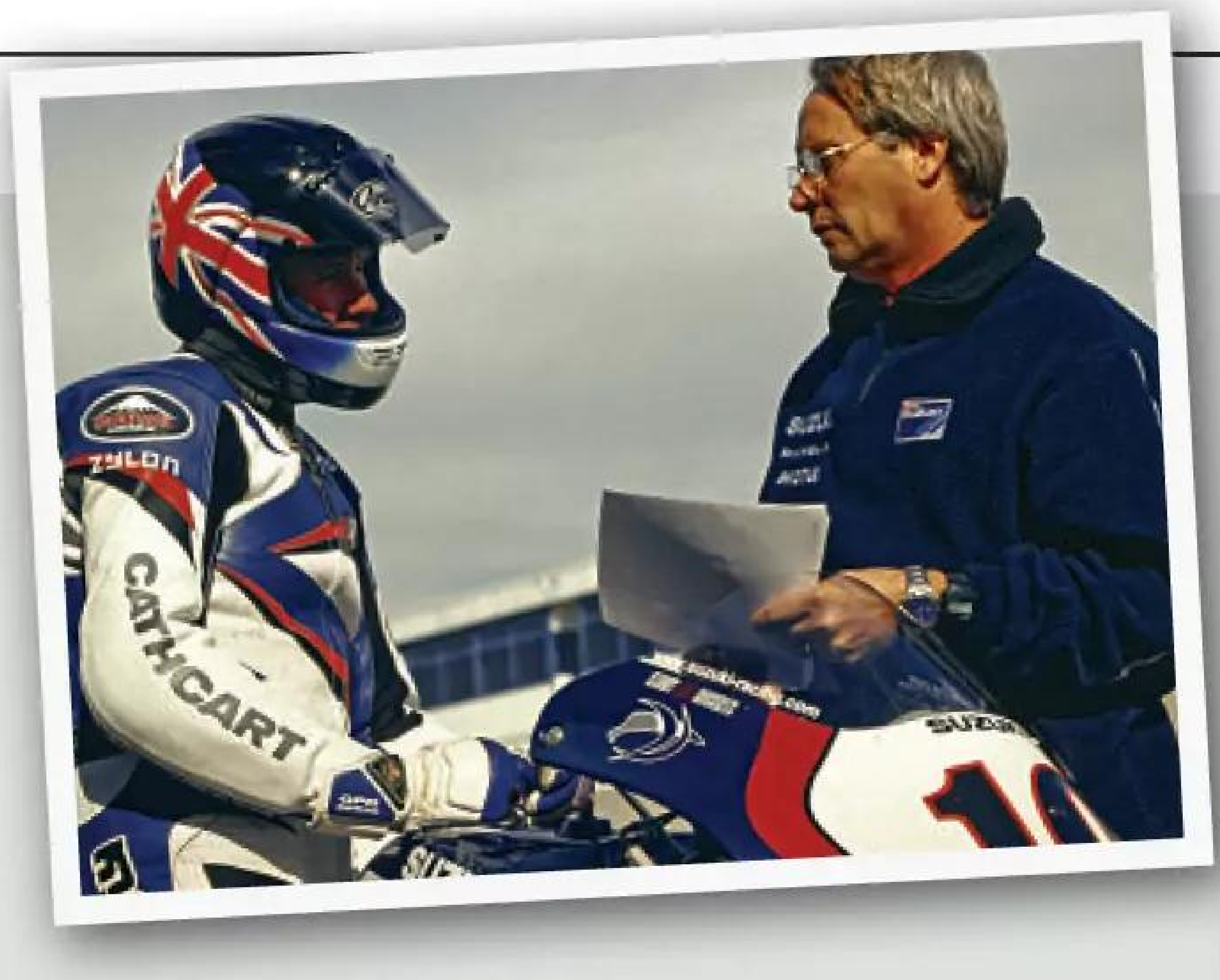
Spanish sponsorship from Telefonica MoviStar came in 2000, replacing Suzuki factory colours.

That came after a different kind of lesson in my previous session, where I was busy complimenting myself about how late I'd left my braking for the balls-out first-turn Doohan Corner, waiting till the 150-metre board at the end of the main pit straight before knocking it back two gears from wide open in top, and braking pretty hard – when KR blasted past, still hard on the gas in top gear! "I've done a 31 round here, but only by not braking at all for Turn One," confirmed Kenny laconically later.

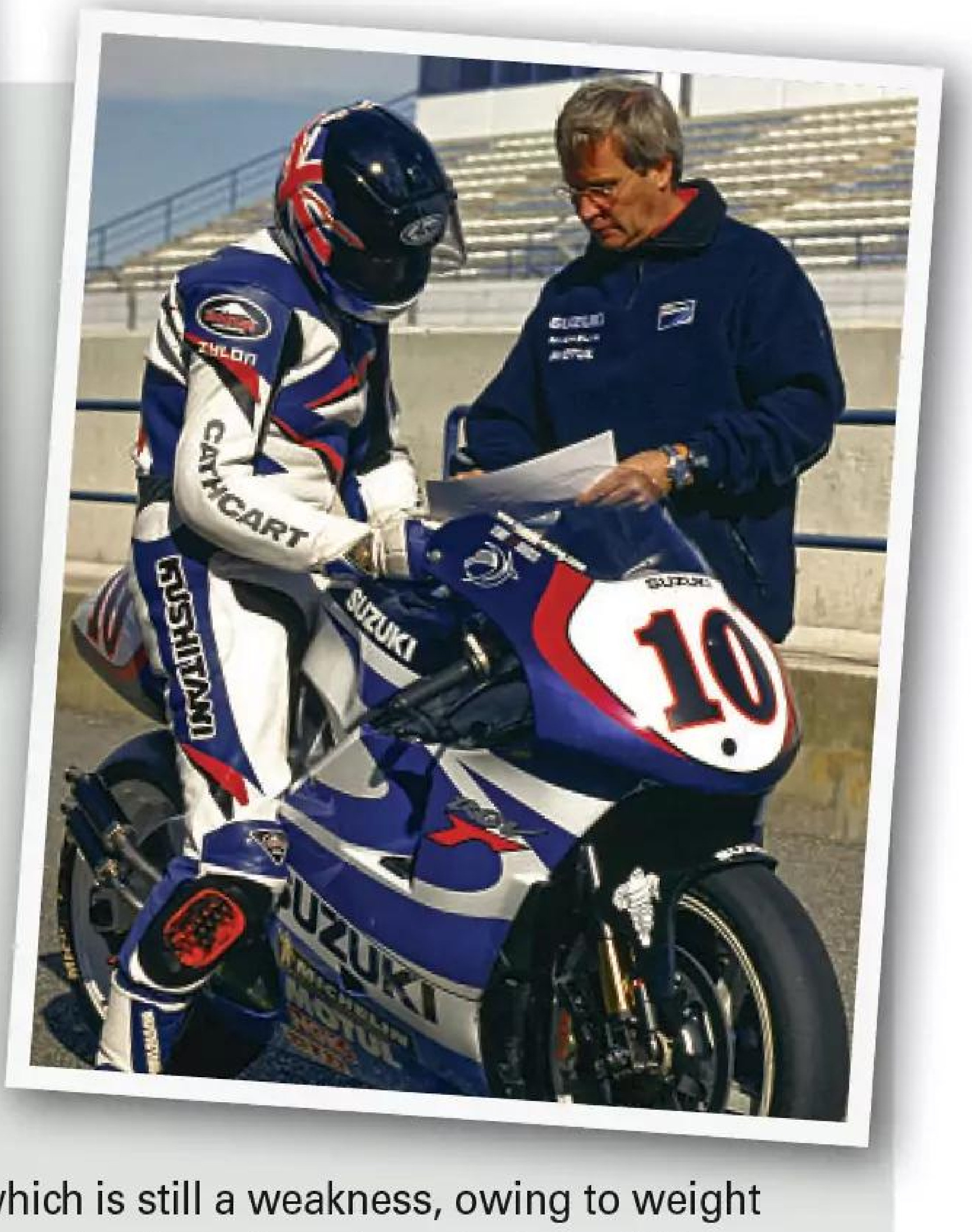
"I just hook it back two gears at the 100 mark and scrub off the speed on the tyre. Okay, it takes a while to work up to that – but it's one of the Suzuki's main advantages, how much turn speed you can carry on it. That's our big handicap: we're down on horsepower compared to the Hondas and Yamahas, so if we can get away ahead of them in a race, we're looking good to win it. But if we have a Honda rider ahead of us, every time he gets on the gas hard, he pulls distance on us before our bike responds, because they have better power. That makes it awful hard to get past – I can out-brake anyone on the Suzuki, but not if I'm starting from 20 yards back, because of

Corner speed was a big plus for the 2000 RGV.

Warren Willing: power behind the throne



Sir Al and the legendary Warren Willing at the test of the 1999 RGV500.



The kingmaker responsible for crowning King Kenny II in 2000 was the late Australian engineer Warren Willing, who was himself a top-level rider 20 years earlier, but who sadly died of cancer in 2015, aged 68.

A severe leg injury in the 1979 NW 200 in Ulster put an end to his riding career but Willing once again headed straight to the top as a race engineer. Warren became a technical guru in Kenny Roberts Senior's Yamaha team, where his skills provided the platform for Wayne Rainey's trio of titles.

He then helped create Roberts' lightweight Modenas KR3 500GP three-cylinder, before joining Suzuki in 1999 in tandem with Kenny Junior. Willing then masterminded a fourth World title, this time for the son of the man he'd previously worked with. In doing so, he helped KR Jr get Suzuki back in contention again after five years in the doldrums, building on the runner-up spot in the 500GP World Championship he and Roberts earned in 1999 to take the 2000 500cc world championship against stiff competition from the bigger Yamaha and Honda race factories.

To achieve this, Willing and the British-based Suzuki Grand Prix team worked with the Japanese firm's engineers on further refining the XR89 version of the RGV500. "Since you last rode it a year ago there have been some handling refinements, but the main emphasis on R&D has been on the engine, even though this is still lacking in a couple of obvious areas," Warren told me at Phillip Island.

"At Valencia they introduced a new wider-angle 80-degree V4 motor – same as what we started the 1999 season with, before they started juggling around with it and went to the 70-degree format. The angle of the reed-valves into the crankcase was the key factor, which with different porting and revised ignition gives a better throttle connection, and more horsepower in the 5-9000rpm area – well, on the dyno at full throttle, at least, even if you don't use this so much on the race track, where you're wide open only around 35% of every lap. But it did improve rideability, with a smoother power transition and that's what we'd been asking for.

We've now got a good balance between power delivery, throttle connection and handling – but now for next season we're hoping for an improvement in the other part of the powerband, with the extra mid-range we still need. Its absence doesn't show up at a lot of tracks, but when it does, it's a real problem – like at the Sachsenring, where every Honda or Yamaha rider who passed Kenny did so in the same place, where you're in fifth gear wide open, and have to accelerate through the 10,000 rpm mid-range barrier. We're down on top-end horsepower – but that isn't nearly so much of a factor, especially since we have more over-rev than last year, thanks also to refinements in carburation and port timing. It runs up to 14,000rpm quite nicely, to save a gear-change or keep the front wheel on the ground when you change up: a notable improvement over '99."

"Chassis-wise, we still have the same basic geometry as in '99," Warren continued, "but with slightly altered construction, and we've refined the rear shock linkage. Although we have three different links, 90% of the time we use just one of those – though here at Phillip Island is one of the exceptions, where you drive out of so many turns with greater lean angle, in order to maximise corner speed. We wanted to make the rear suspension more compliant, especially under braking, which is still a weakness, owing to weight transfer. Though we have tested a 180 degree 'screamer' motor, we're still lacking a little too much in mid-range power to be able to use that configuration, so we've retained the big-bang closed-up firing order from before. This masks the lack of mid-range a little, without going to too big a bang, which compromises top speed. But because of that, there's more engine braking on the Suzuki when you change down under braking, compared to the even firing order Honda, and that's why the rear tyre tends to skid about, so we have to work on controlling that. We've also altered the weight balance a little bit, with the aim of improving stability under braking, by altering the engine mass location relative to the rider – we tested a slightly different engine position mid-season, and that's seemed beneficial to Kenny.

"There's been ongoing development on the fork, too: Öhlins has more than lived up to our hopes, especially since Brno, where we really made a breakthrough. Now we have a pretty established set-up, only changing the offsets half a mill occasionally, depending on the front tyre we choose. We've used the same 17-inch front almost everywhere. Kenny tried the 16.5 in '99, but felt it didn't offer an advantage. Since Estoril, we've used a 16.5 rear race tyre because we had some endurance problems with the 17, even though Kenny prefers it. The grip level at maximum lean comes down, so then the mid-turn drive suffers a performance drop, and the bike starts to get unstable. When that happens, he can't get that early drive out of the turn. Even late in a race the 16.5 tyre maintains side grip, and when it does eventually spin it assists turning! But it does make the bike feel heavier to change direction with, which on a sweet steering bike like this is important. Also, the grip level isn't as good as a 17."

There was disappointment that the 2000-spec RGV500 was still down on power compared to its rivals: a 17bhp deficit compared to the NSR500 at 10,000rpm. The bikes were even on top speed but acceleration was the problem. The difference for 2000 was the rider. When he could get away ahead – KR JR would normally win!

Many variations of the V4 were tried by Suzuki, including a 180-degree 'screamer' motor.

the power deficiency." Unless you don't brake at all for some turns, of course...

Even at my slower pace on the Suzuki, I could appreciate how well it kept up turn speed, with good feel from the Öhlins fork adopted by the team midway through the 1999 season, and ideally set up to give lots of feedback from the 17-inch Michelin front tyre that the team invariably raced with, rather than the 16.5-incher favoured by other teams. But lessons in maintaining momentum aside, it was the braking from high speed that took most coming to terms with on the World champion RGV500: for sure, that's where I lost most time. The previous year at Jerez this was the one aspect of the bike I felt able to criticise, and indeed its lack of stability under heavy braking was also commented on by some of Kenny's rivals, including the man he succeeded as World champion, Honda's Alex Crivillé.

At Phillip Island a year later this was the single greatest obstacle to a faster lap time, especially in terms of relearning all my superbike braking points to reflect the awesome effectiveness of the Brembo carbon brakes. Manufactured by the Italian firm from Mitsubishi composite material, which maintained heat longer and so gave better feel at lower lever pressures, as well as super-effective stopping at higher speeds, these were also more durable. "The Suzuki team has consumed just three sets of discs per bike all season," said Brembo technician Eugenio Gandolfi, "…but we'd prefer them to use smaller 290mm discs at Phillip Island, as they do at several other tracks to help keep up disc temperature in colder conditions. Only Kenny prefers the bigger 320mm discs for their extra performance at the several points of heavy braking from high speed here in Australia."

The Suzuki's capable chassis proved just as forgiving round a fast, fearsome track like Phillip Island as it was at a slower, switchback one like Jerez. It still changed direction so easily and felt beautifully balanced driving hard over the bumps exiting Siberia, shrugging off their effects effortlessly as it drove hard up the hill, holding its line perfectly as it did so – well, once I'd chosen it correctly! Through the next fast right, though, it was better to take it one gear lower than expected in order to stay on line, with the engine singing at high revs but off the end of the torque curve – use a higher gear, and this had the effect of pushing the front wheel wide and making you back off to correct. Under power, the Suzuki was so finely poised, only shaking its head once per lap over the big bump in Turn 12 leading on to the Gardner Straight past the Pits, though that was probably down to a rear shock setting a little too soft for my 8kg extra weight compared to Kenny's.

Elsewhere, the XR89 chassis was ultra-stable – though if you squeezed the brakes to correct your entry speed once leant over and committed to a turn, it did sit up and understeer straight ahead. This meant it rewarded a clean, precise 250GP-style style of riding such as Junior excelled in, and once I worked up to it, I could keep up turn speed by taking lots of angle, which the extra side grip of the 16.5-inch Michelin rear allowed me to take advantage of when driving hard out of the exit. The fact that I (ahem) found this out by mistake, when I missed my braking point for Turn 2 and had to scrabble round the Southern Loop at what seemed a suicidally fast turn speed, is of course completely irrelevant. Next lap, I went just as fast round there – but this time on purpose...

The only time the XR89 chassis felt nervous was braking really hard: especially downhill into MG Corner, when the extra weight transfer supplied by gravity made an already awkward situation even worse. Though Kenny Roberts said he used the back brake first to counter this, it really felt a handful, especially compared to the more balanced behaviour of Valentino's rival Honda NSR500 I'd be riding

SUZUKI RGV500 XR89

Engine:	Liquid-cooled 80-degree V4 crankcase reed-valve two-stroke, with twin contra-rotating crankshafts, electronic power valve and electronically-controlled variable-dimension exhaust system
Dimensions:	54 x 54.5mm
Capacity:	499cc
Output:	Over 180 bhp at 12,500rpm (at crankshaft)
Carburation:	4 x 36mm Keihin flatslide with electronic powerjets
Ignition:	Nippondenso programmable electronic CDI
Gearbox:	6-speed extractable
Clutch:	Multiplate dry (9 friction/10 steel)
Chassis:	Fabricated aluminium twin-spar frame with rear section machined from solid billet
Suspension:	Front: Fully-adjustable 42mm Öhlins inverted telescopic fork. Rear: Fabricated aluminium swingarm with rising rate link and Öhlins monoshock
Head angle:	23 degrees (+/- 2.0 degrees)
Trail:	89-104mm variable
Wheelbase:	1400mm
Weight:	132kg with oil/water, less fuel tank
Weight distribution:	54/46%
Brakes:	Front: 2 x 320mm Brembo carbon discs with radially-mounted four-piston four-pad Brembo calipers and adjustable master cylinder
Rear:	1 x 210mm Suzuki steel disc with two-piston Brembo caliper
Wheels/tyres:	Front: 12/60-17 Michelin on 3.50 in. Marchesini forged magnesium wheel. Rear: 10/67-420 (16.5-inch) Michelin on 6.25 in. Marchesini forged magnesium wheel
Top speed:	Over 310kph/193mph
Year of construction:	2000
Owner:	Suzuki Motor Corporation, Hamamatsu, Japan

SUZUKI
MICHELIN Pilot
marchesini
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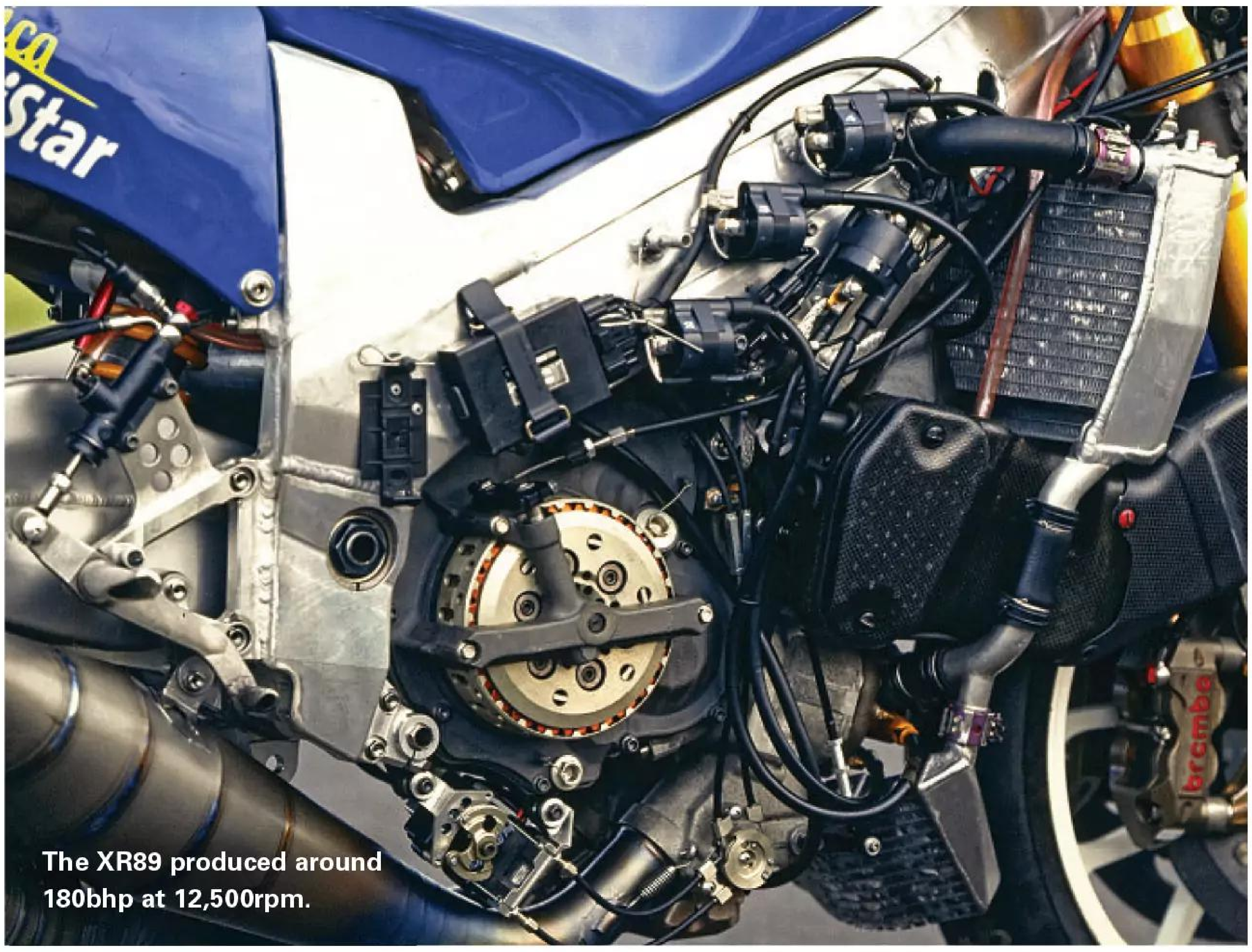
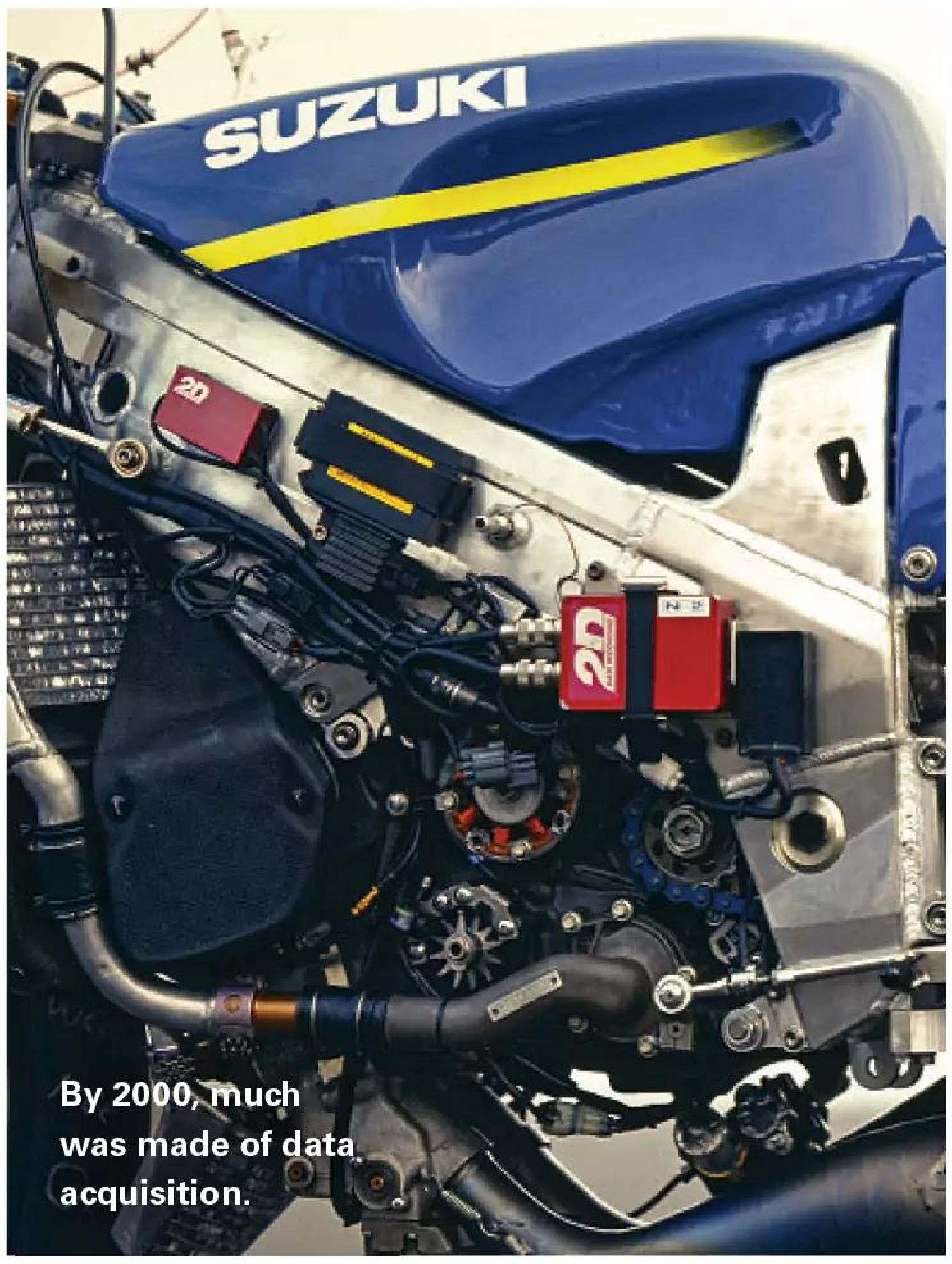
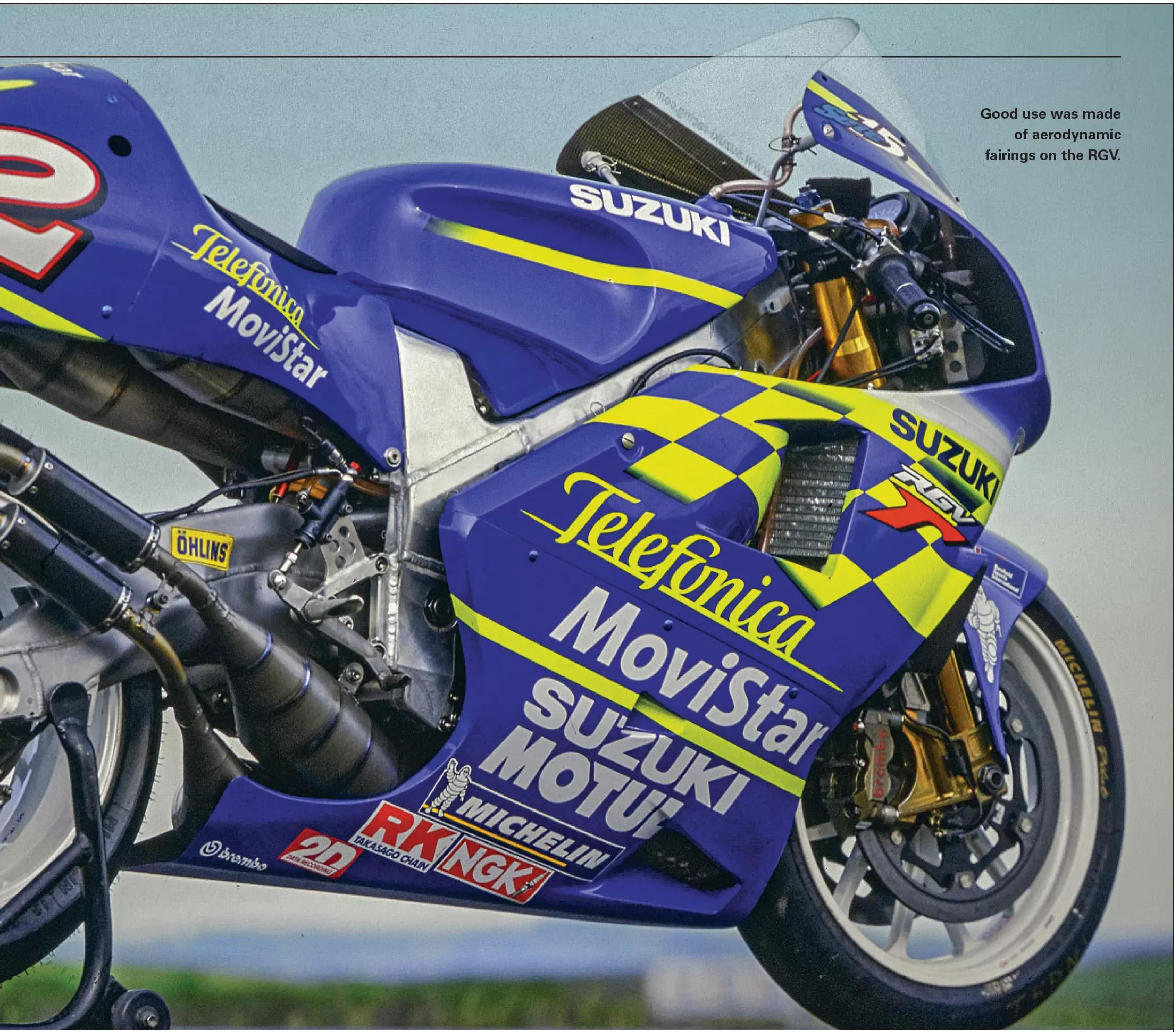


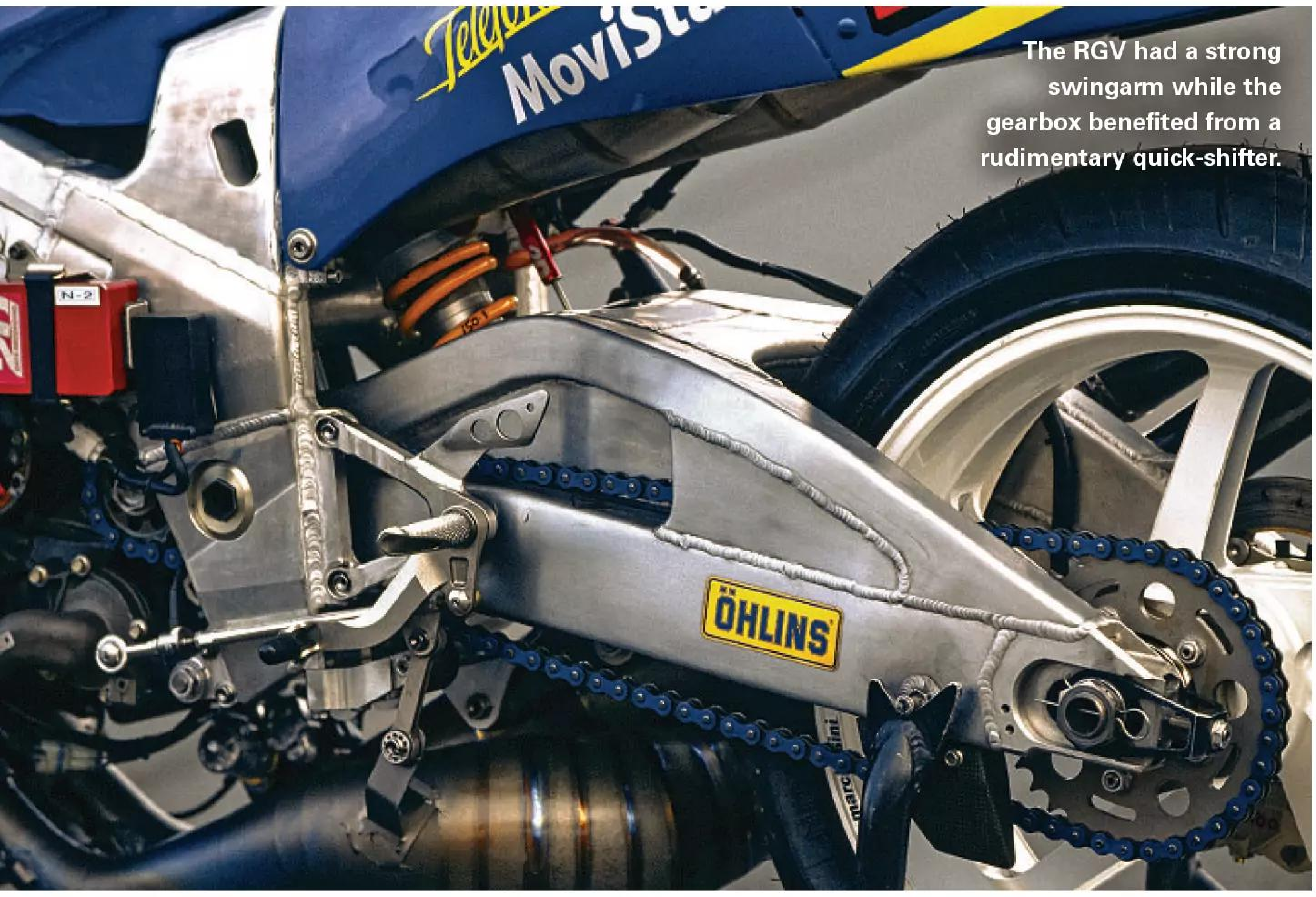
The XR89 produced around 180bhp at 12,500rpm.



By 2000, much was made of data acquisition.



Good use was made of aerodynamic fairings on the RGV.



The RGV had a strong swingarm while the gearbox benefited from a rudimentary quick-shifter.

the following month in Jerez. Ironically, this was particularly apparent at Honda Corner, where I'd come sweeping round the blind left-hander of Lukey Heights at high revs in fifth gear on the side of the tyre, then have to brake really hard while still cranked over, for the bottom gear right-hand Honda hairpin immediately after.

The fearsome grip of the carbon brakes, coupled with the high-speed momentum, lifted the back wheel in the air as I was trying to pull the Suzuki upright, sending it waving around as the bike snaked under stopping – all of which made it very hard to pick a line for the turn, and hold to it. Twice I chickened out of trusting the front Michelin's ability to make up for all this and take me through the turn at excessive speed on the wrong line and took to the escape road. Actually, I visited it three times in all: the third at the end of Kenny Roberts' left boot, after they'd forgotten to switch on the fuel tap before sending me out for my second session, sending the V4 motor spluttering to a standstill on the run down to Honda! Thanks for the push…

It was on the engine that the greatest improvement between the Roberts runner-up bike I rode a year earlier and his title-winning motorcycle was most obviously apparent, because the bottom-end power which Warren Willing confirmed back then was one of the bike's weak areas had been greatly improved, plus the transition into the stronger mid-range zone around 10,500rpm was even more smoothed out.

Compared to the meatier, more abrupt power delivery of the Honda at the same revs, the twin-crank Suzuki engine was now more user friendly, only just not as powerful as the more brutal, brusquer single-crank NSR500 motor. Arguably it was now better low-down than the Honda, so that exiting MG I could short-shift from first to second around 10,000 rpm while briefly upright, before flicking it into the long, long left-hander that followed, playing the responsive throttle to drive cleanly round and pick up speed as the track opened out.

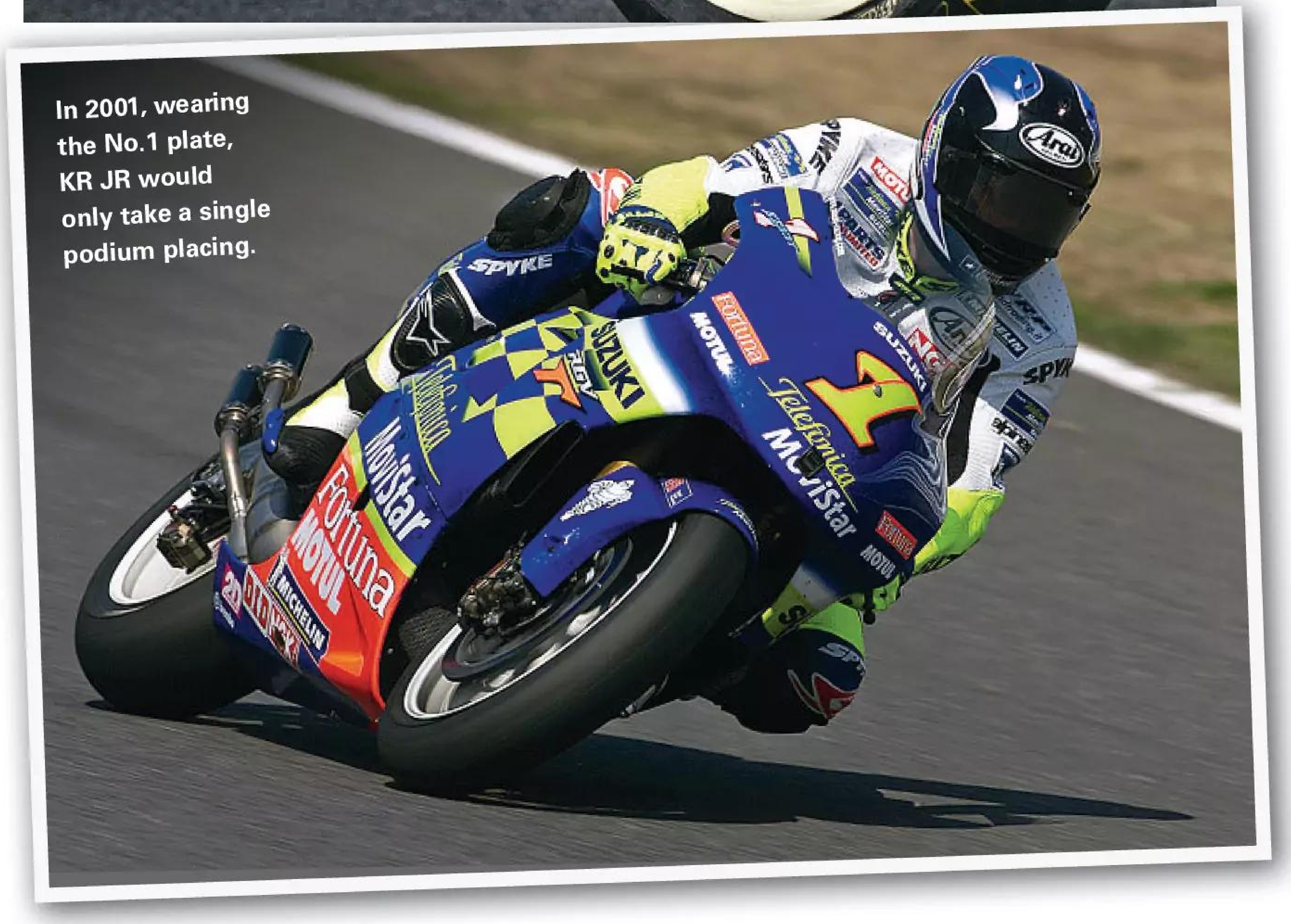
This let me reap the benefit of the 2000 Suzuki's revised porting and electronically-controlled variable-dimension exhausts (same effect as a powervalve) to save performing the rather notchy bottom shift leaned over, when it'd get the rear wheel slightly unhooked. The power-shifter gear-change on the race-pattern gearbox was really nicely set-up, though I'll admit not to paying too much attention to the row of five red shift lights which illuminated in succession across the top of the analogue tacho, on the grounds that I was too busy holding on tight as the Suzuki's front wheel pawed the air, and I desperately tried to persuade my brain to keep up with the fearsome acceleration of a 500GP two-stroke on such a daunting track.

Remembering what Warren Willing had told me the previous year as I struggled to keep the front wheel on the ground exiting the final turn at Jerez before the pits, I coped with the similar power wheelies out of Siberia by revving the Suzuki hard so that the engine fell off the end of the torque curve, which paradoxically provided a better drive than using the fat part of the power-band around 11,500 revs. That was also better for my heart rate, too – at least I could now see where I was pointing it for the next turn, without landing the front wheel with the 'bars all crossed up where I was trying to turn the bike with the wheel in the air...

King Kenny II had his work cut out in defending his 500GP world crown in 2001, after Suzuki suspended two-stroke R&D in favour of its new four-stroke GSV-R MotoGP project. So much so that he finished 11th in the final 500cc World Championship, with just a single visit to the rostrum all year long, with a third at Valencia – pretty average for a defending champion.

But he won it fair and square in 2000 on a Suzuki which proved to be the best all-round package on the grid – just as his dad did 20 years earlier, overcoming the more potent rotary-valve Suzukis on a similarly underpowered Yamaha. Like father, like son…*CR*

Ohlins worked closely with the team to maximum effect with the suspension.


In 2001, wearing the No.1 plate, KR JR would only take a single podium placing.

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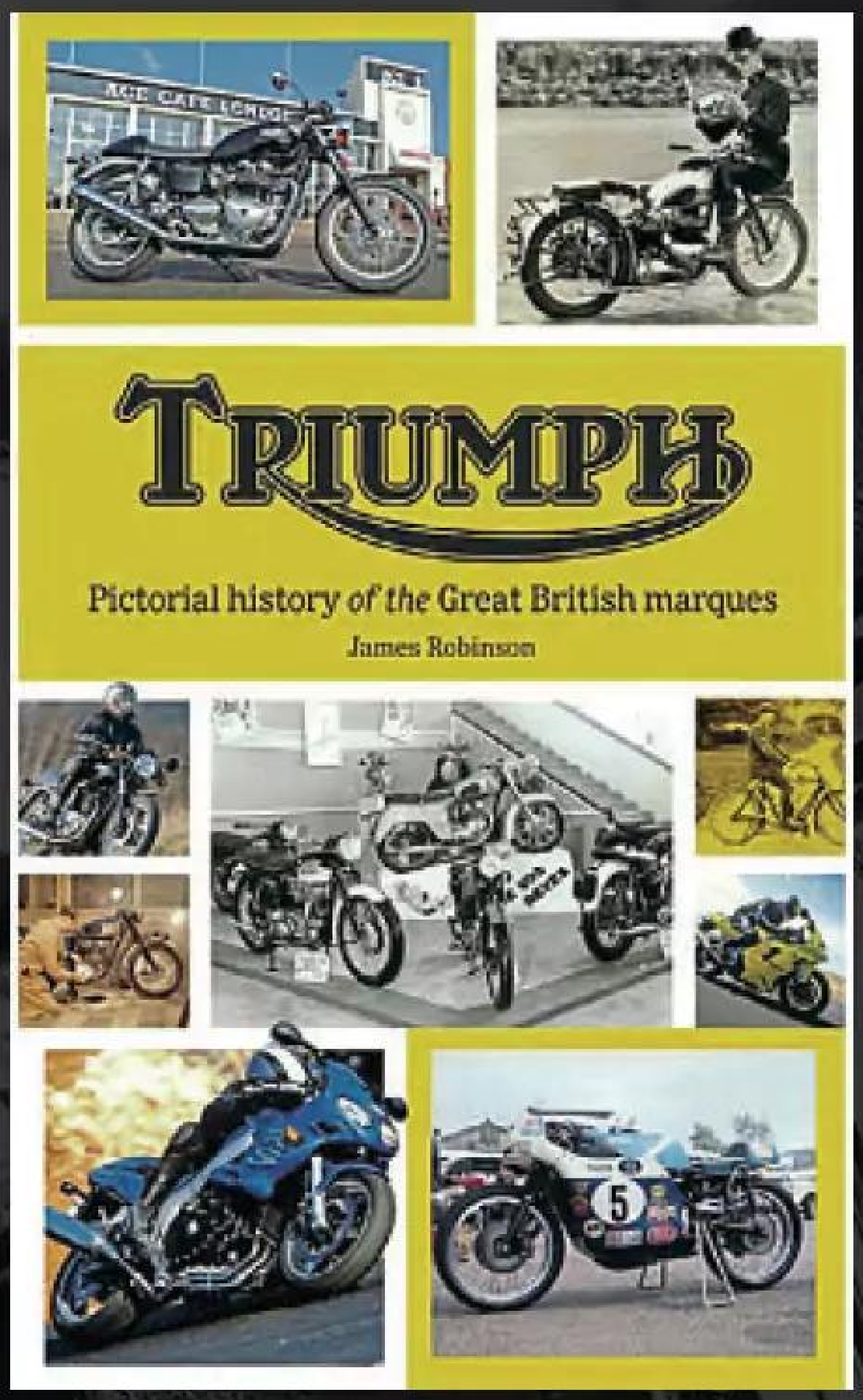
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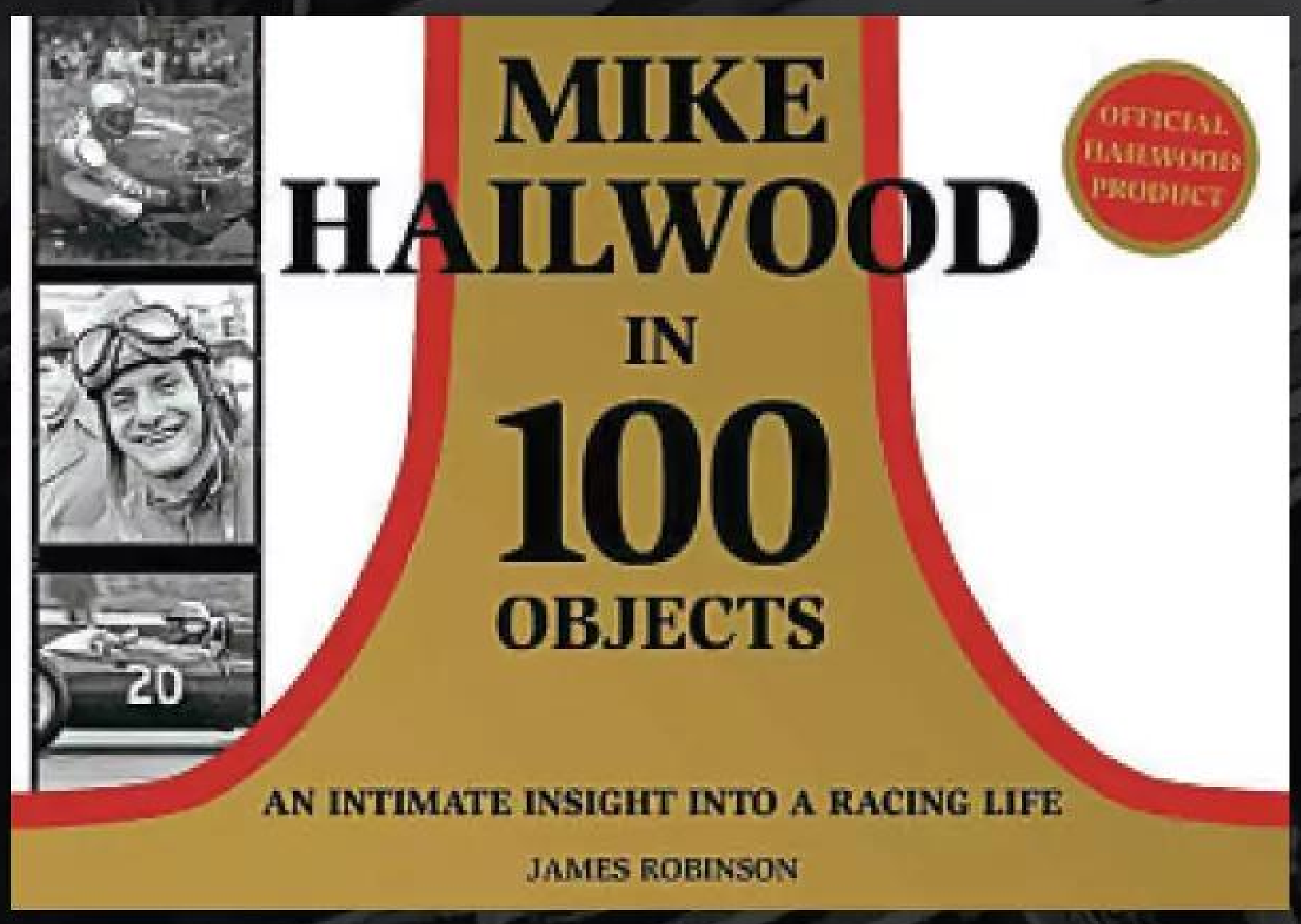
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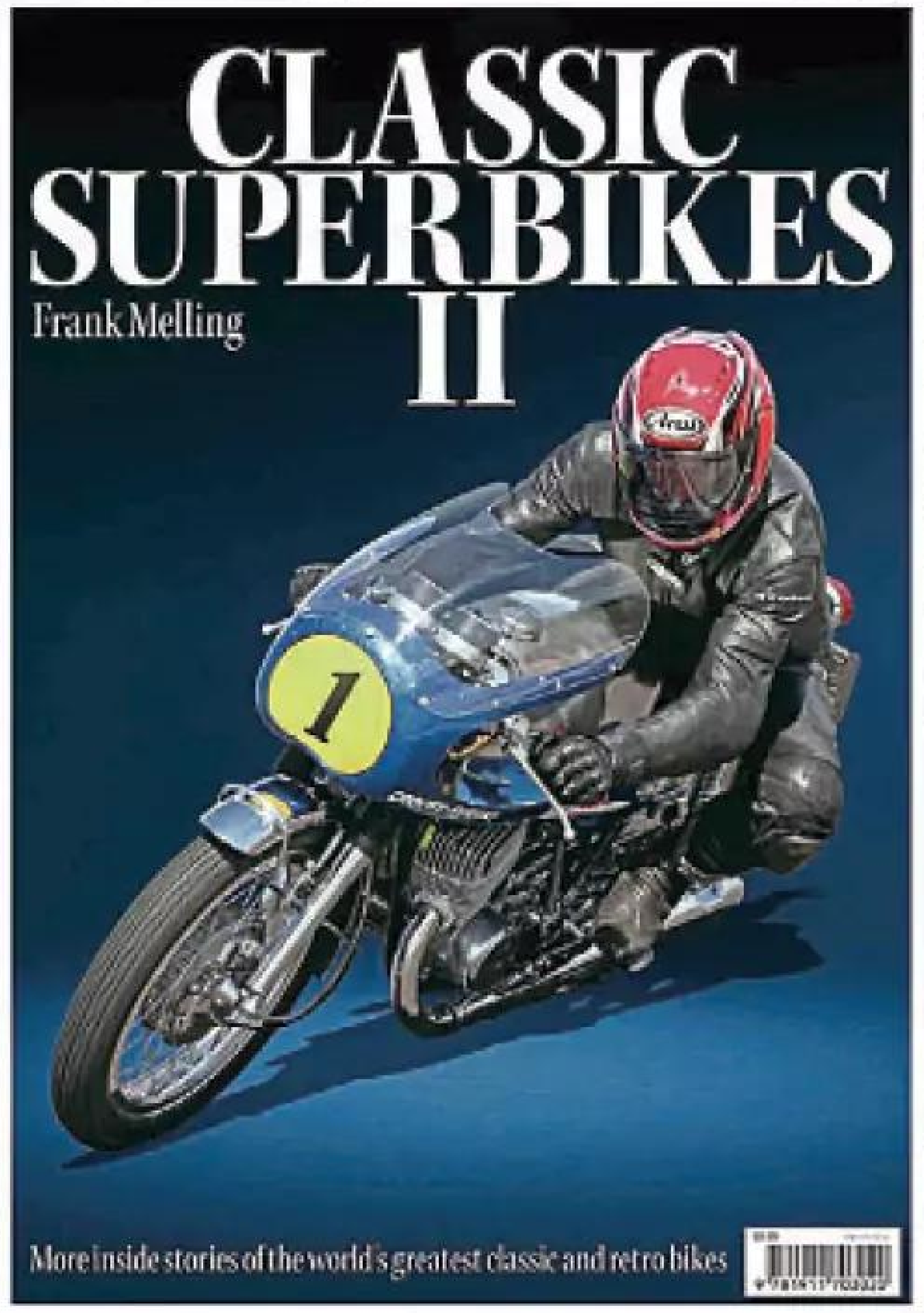
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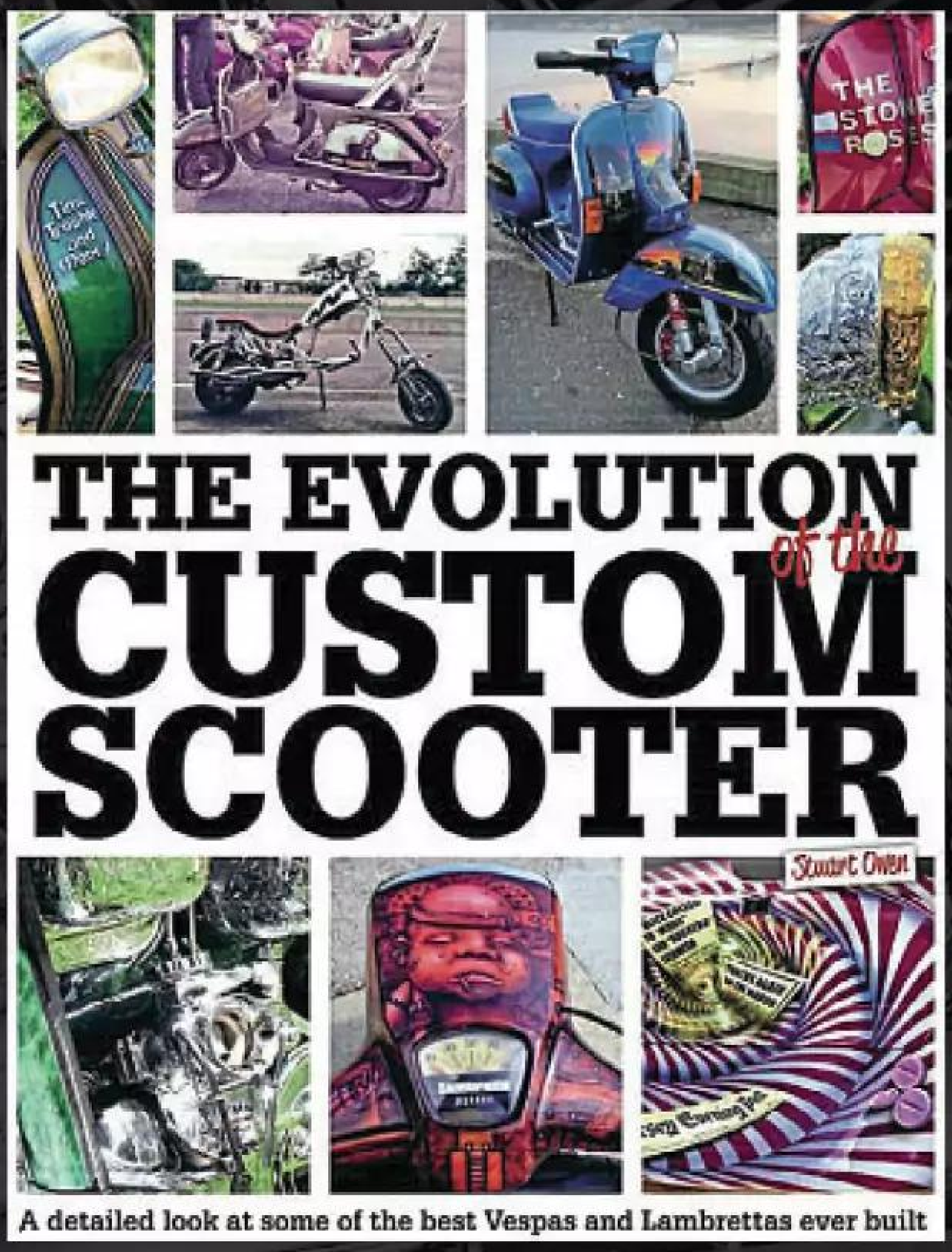
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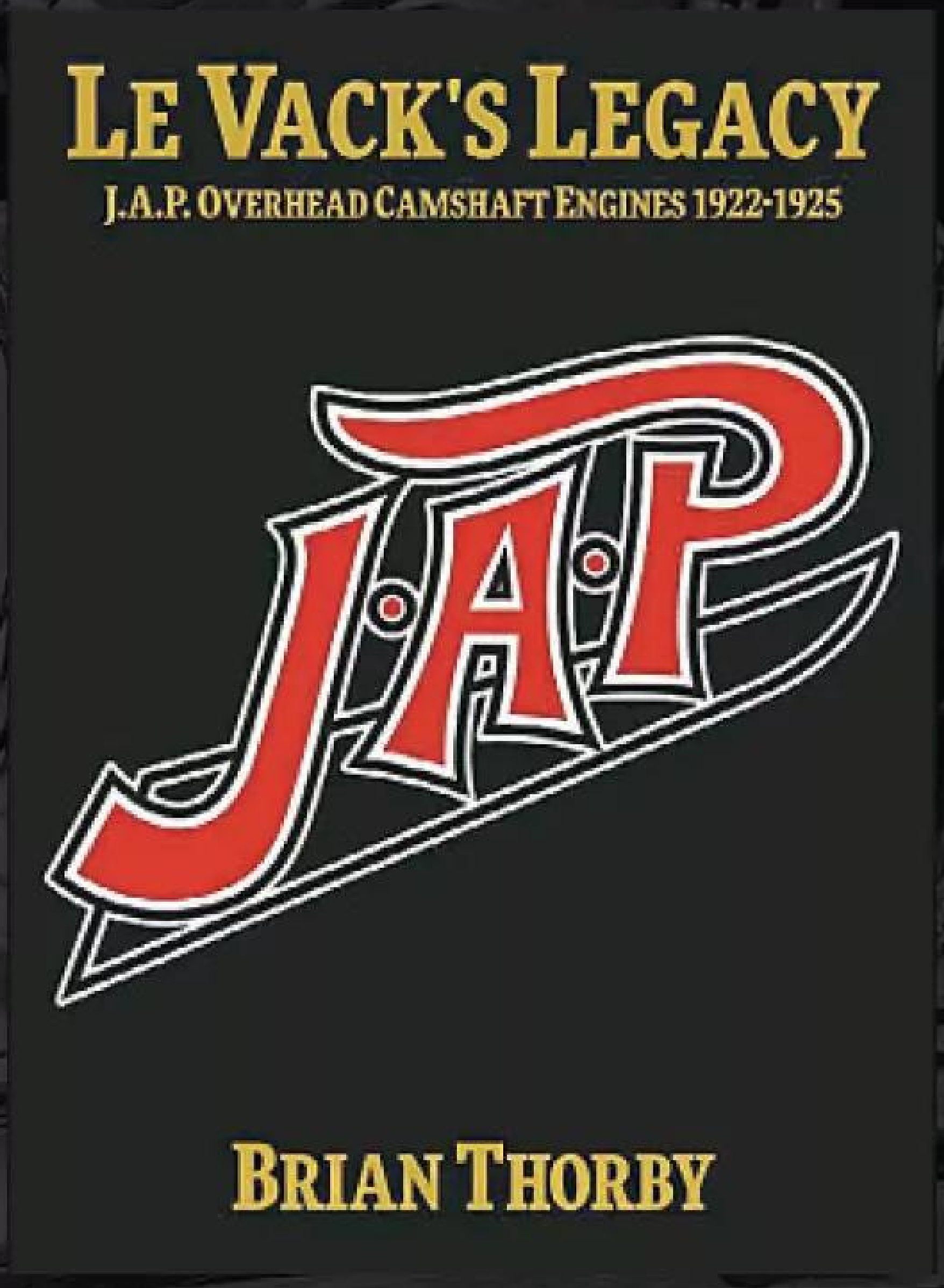
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MARVELLOUS MAMOLA!

Photograph: Nick Nicholls/Mortons Archive

Randy Mamola: four-time 500cc World Championship runner-up.

DANCING DOWN THE PIT LANE

On the eve of the launch of his autobiography, some-time racer, suspension expert, team manager and Mallory Park circuit boss Stuart Hicken gives us a potted history of his time on two wheels.

Words: Stuart Hicken **Photographs:** Double Red, Bill Snelling, Stuart Hicken, Jack Burnicle and Dave Evans

PART ONE

Oddly, my office overlooks the Mallory Park hairpin and at the 1959 Post TT the Swiss rider Gyula Marsovszky crashed in flames right in front of me, right below where I'm sitting now.

It was the first meeting I'd ever been to, I cycled with my mate, and I turned to him and said: "Flippin 'eck, this is good, I'm gonna have a go at this one day!" And so I did.

I had a 650 Triumph by the time I was 16, but my track debut was on a Thruxton Venom, and back in the 1960s racing was a real leveller, anyone could be besides you on the grid. The first time I went to Croft I noticed this right scruffy urchin on a similar Velocette to mine and he was behind me at the first corner, a right-hander after the start-finish straight. I changed down, he changed up and then disappeared into the scenery. You could see his head going up and down, flat out, through the corn. That was my first sighting of Mick Grant and oddly Croft was where I first got acquainted with Barry Sheene, again as we were on similar bikes.

He clocked my ex-Tommy Robb Bultaco, sauntered over and said: "Fackin' 'ell mate, wot's the gearing around 'ere then?" He was quickly on to a whole different level to me, but he'd always speak to me after that. He'd have this: "Yo, yo, Mr Bultaco", greeting, then trot out this little tune: "Bulto, Bulto, made of tin, ride 'em out and push 'em in." It was funny, but it had the ring of truth to it unfortunately, and it was one of the reason's I moved on to an ex-Geoff Barry G50. Oh, did I love that bike.

I did my first Manx GP on it, but boy did you learn fast over there. I remember being up on the Mountain one morning practice, lost in the mist and rain, when a rider came past me like I was going backwards. I only caught his name on the arse of his leathers, 'Hussey', so back in the MGP Riders' Association hut, cradling a cup of tea, when I saw Brian Hussey, I asked: "How do you go so effing fast?" He smiled: "Ah, when it's misty I count. I count between the corners, remember the gaps, and whether to go left or right." Can you believe it?

It sounded nuts, but you soon learnt that it's all down to experience. Roger Nicholls told me a similar tale. He said he was just thinking he was on for a 100mph practice lap, as a newcomer, when this bike comes alongside him and, as he looks across, there's travelling marshal Albert Moule, on a Trident, mouthing: "…are you alright? Follow me." He said he nearly stopped and chucked the bike in the ditch. Here's Roger, a British champion, and there's a 70-year-old bloke on a road bike, with his trousers tucked into his socks, thinking Roger's going so slowly there might be something wrong!

Roger did okay though, second place in the 1977 Formula One TT behind Ready, and eventually I got the hang of it too. I went on to race a Vendetta Kawasaki 750 and TZ350, but I needed to earn a living and business pretty much took over after that.

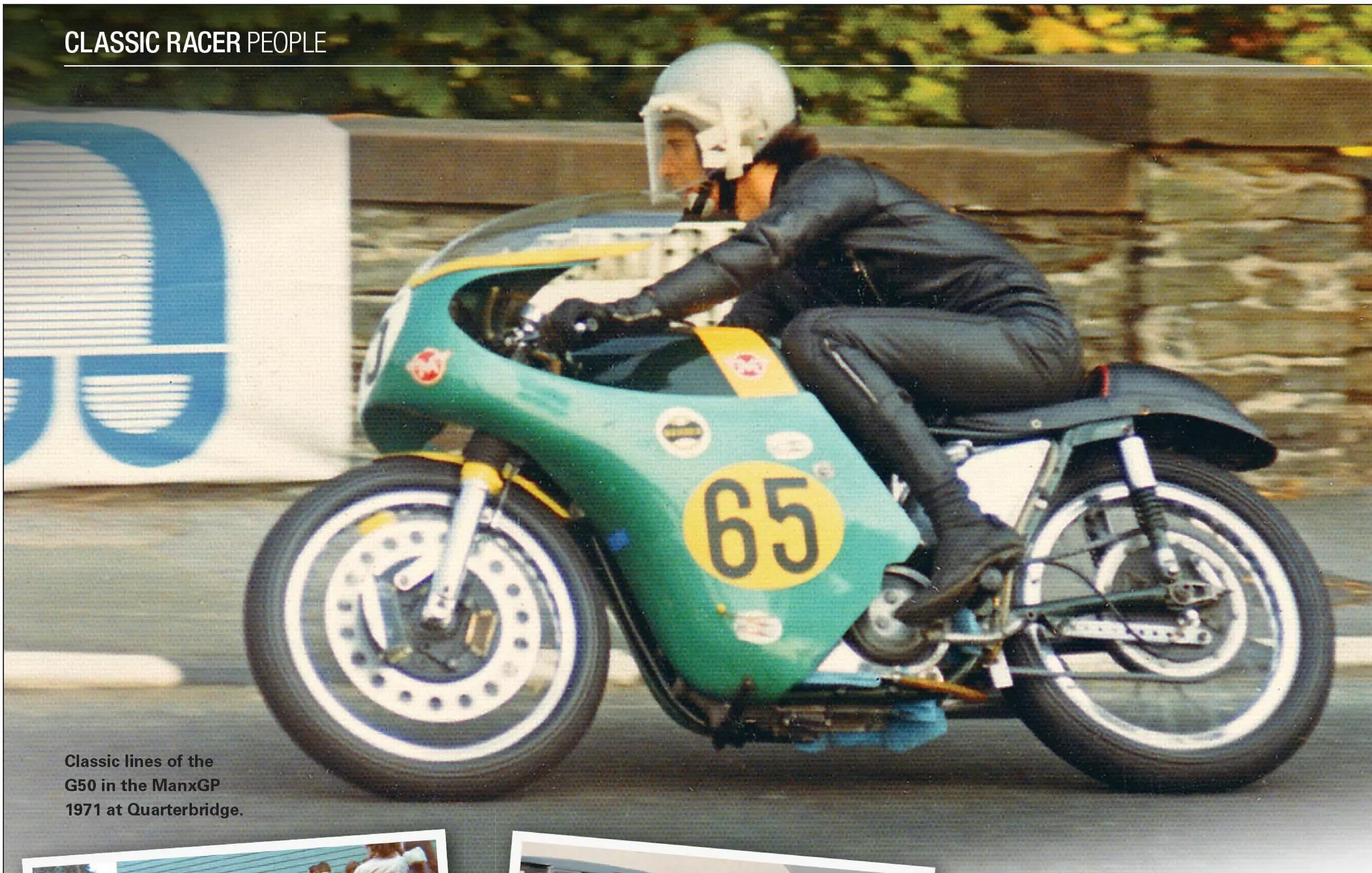
Getting dirty

In the early 1970s I set up P&S Motorcycles, taking a truck out to road-race and motocross events every weekend. I was selling all the usual consumables but when I did the sums, motocross was making three or four times what the road-racing was. Scramblers break so much and wear it out. You have to go where the money is and it was probably the wisest

As many know Stuart: Master of Mallory Park! Here with Ray Stringer.

WAGON
ROCK OIL

A thoughtful Hicken, in his words: "...wearing John Cooper-style jumper over my leathers while racing the G50!"



Classic lines of the G50 in the ManxGP 1971 at Quarterbridge.

Stuart Hicken and his G50 way back in 1976: but at what track?

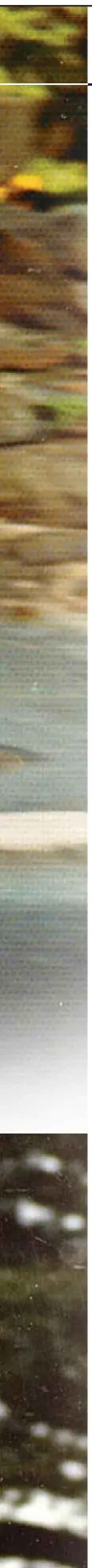
Tommy Robb and his Bultaco at the 1967 Diamond Jubilee TT.

Flying over Ballaugh on the Vendetta during practice for the 1974 Manx.

move I ever made. I ended up as the biggest-selling Bultaco dealer in Europe, adding KTM, and through travelling to all the meetings I started a sideline in suspension and special parts. In the 1970s there was all sorts going on in suspension and chassis design and I became aware that the Dutch White Power company were well ahead of the game.

Badger Goss had the WP franchise, but, as he wasn't really pushing it, I asked: "How much do you want for it?" It was a lot, but I paid it and never looked back. I set-up a new company, Speedscene, in Newall and soon had 13 dealers around the country and an annual turnover of £1.5 million. Not bad for a one-man band, but WP had good products and boomed. It was nonstop, ridiculous really, doing all the motocross GPs as well as British events, but I still found a bit of time for road-racing, and walking through the paddock at Darley Moor one day, someone shouted: "Hey Stu, what you doing here?"

I turned around and it was Dave Hickman, Peter Hickman's dad. He was in these blue overalls, by a little tent and when I looked inside it was like: "Oh, that's a bit different." The next thing I know there's another familiar face. I'd not seen Brian Crighton in a million years, not since he was the Darley 50cc champion, riding a CR110 Honda, but he said: "The Norton's out in two races, could you go and have a look, as we're struggling chassis-wise?" They weren't joking. This bike had a non-adjustable Koni unit on the back and a pair of RGV250 forks on the front, and effing hell, going into the corners it was like, 'chirp, chirp, chirp', skipping and wallowing in equal measure. It was a rocket ship mind, so I said: "Lads, come to my house Monday morning. I'll build you a fully-adjustable WP shock and if you give me the dimension of the steering stem I'll give you a set of yokes and some upside-down forks too." Brian then quietly said: "Are upside down forks the thing to have then?" So I said: "Yeah Brian, everyone has got 'em." Brian was a clever bloke, still is, but he wasn't always up to speed.



The following season Brian got Trevor Nation and Simon Buckmaster on board. The rest, as they say, is history, and as a result of my work when the Norton F1 road bike came out I got WP suspension on them as standard kit. It was good for business, well, good for business while it lasted. I got stitched up rather when KTM took over WP, but as my company was still officially registered as WP Ltd, I sold the name for £9000 to the new importer and next day set-up as Hicken Suspension instead. I branched out into Kayaba, Showa and Öhlins, to go with the existing WP kit, essentially doing exactly as I'd done before, just more so. If it went up and down with oil in it, I was on it, and I got properly back into road-racing again.

The Vendetta-framed G50 at Quarterbridge.

Back on the Tarmac

Among others, I helped Tony, then Michael Rutter, Bradley Smith's dad and then Stuart Medd. Stuart was running TZ250 and YZ500 Yamahas for Kevin 'mad dog' Mitchell in GPs at the time, but I think it was breaking the bank. So, we had a chat and I ended up managing Superbikes for him, back in the UK instead.

For me Michael Rutter was a shoe-in. I felt he had more natural talent that Mick Doohan, and that's something I stand by to this day. It was just that he was a lazy bugger and never wanted to put in the work. Stuart liked the idea though, so for 1993 we got Ray Stringer on board as well. We were running Kawasaki 750s and in April, just a few weeks into our first season and never having run a team before, we decided to do the Brands Hatch World Superbike round, which was oddly called the Irish round that year, as there was another British one, later on. I know racing WSBK one month into your first ever season sounds crazy, but it was sort of do-able back then, and we shocked a few of the established teams for sure.

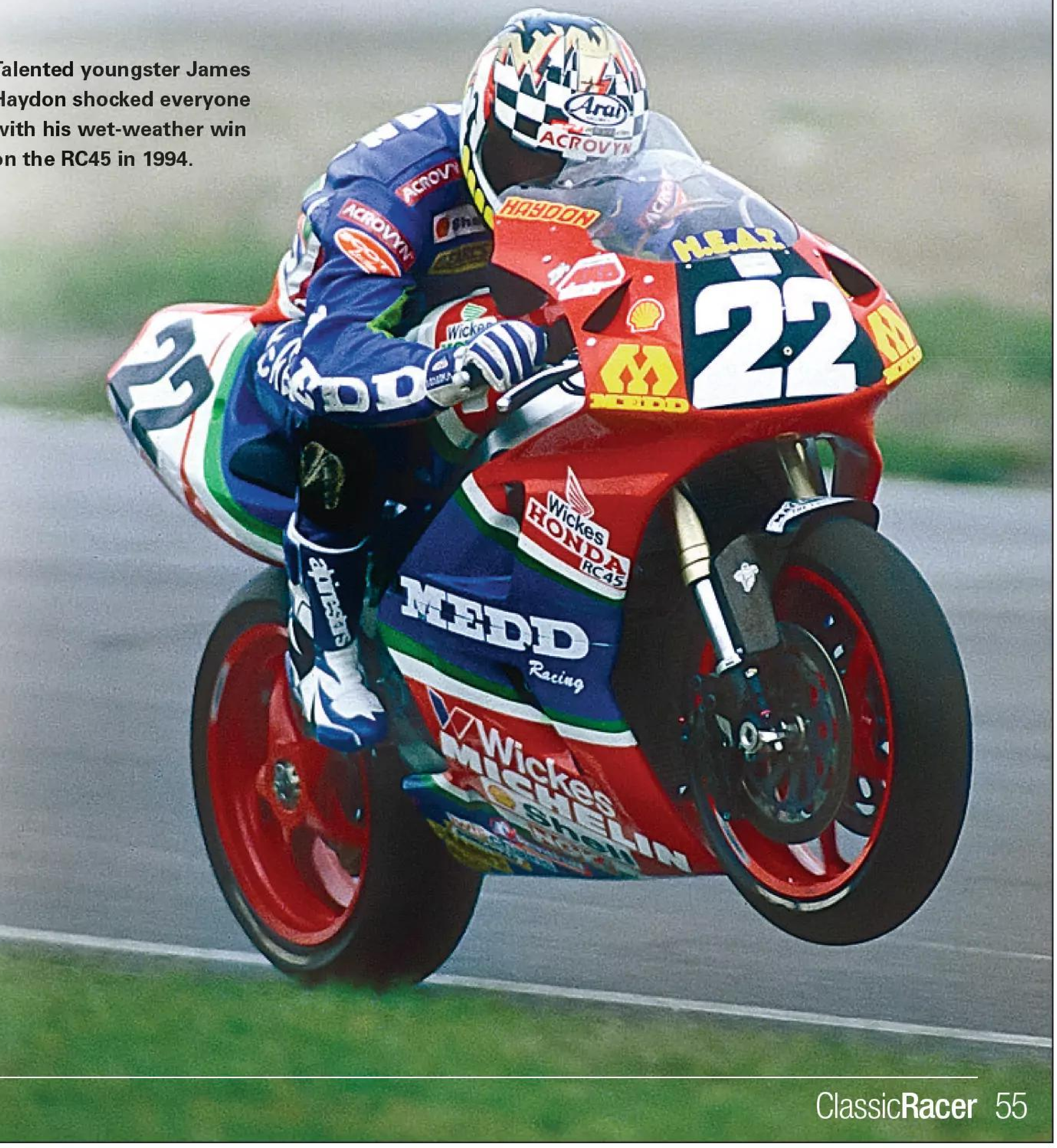
On the morning of the race the heavens opened, Carl Fogarty went 'whoosh' into Clearways on the first lap, and Michael Rutter was then up with Foggy's Ducati team-mate, Giancarlo Falappa, Scott Russell and Brian Morrison for the rest of the race; this in his first full season on a Superbike and he's still not 21. It looked like a podium was on and we were all going 'just stay on it Michael' when an experimental third gear came flying out the back of the engine and that was the end of that. It was an interesting first season though and at the last round of the British championship Michael was fighting for the win at Mallory. He lost out to Jim Moodie's Duckhams Norton in the end though, as that Norton handled beautifully; bugger, I wonder who was responsible for that?

The following season I was out-voted and Stuart Medd went for the new Honda RC45. I wasn't convinced. Looking at photos – we'd never seen an actual bike – I didn't like the swingarm geometry for a start, and in dithering over riders we lost Michael Rutter.

We ended up with Ray Stringer again, Robert Dunlop and James Haydon, though Haydon's interview should have been a portent of the carnage which was to come. We all got to Medd's head office I think for a 10am

Robert Dunlop on the Medd Honda: note the padding to make him comfy on it. Tragedy was sadly to come at the TT.

Stuart Medd, Stuart Hicken and rider coach Roger Marshall.



Talented youngster James Haydon shocked everyone with his wet-weather win on the RC45 in 1994.

start. Stuart had this big boardroom, huge oak table and there we all are, but no James; no call from him, nothing. We're strumming our fingers, making paper aeroplanes, then, just as we're about to give up, this sporty-looking little car comes screeching into the yard and James rushes into the boardroom in a fluster: "Sorry chaps. I've just had a crash! Bloody motorway services. I came out onto the slip-road and it came around on me and kept going. I hit the concrete barrier. Worst thing is, that it's mum's car." It wasn't just his mum's car which got wrecked that season.

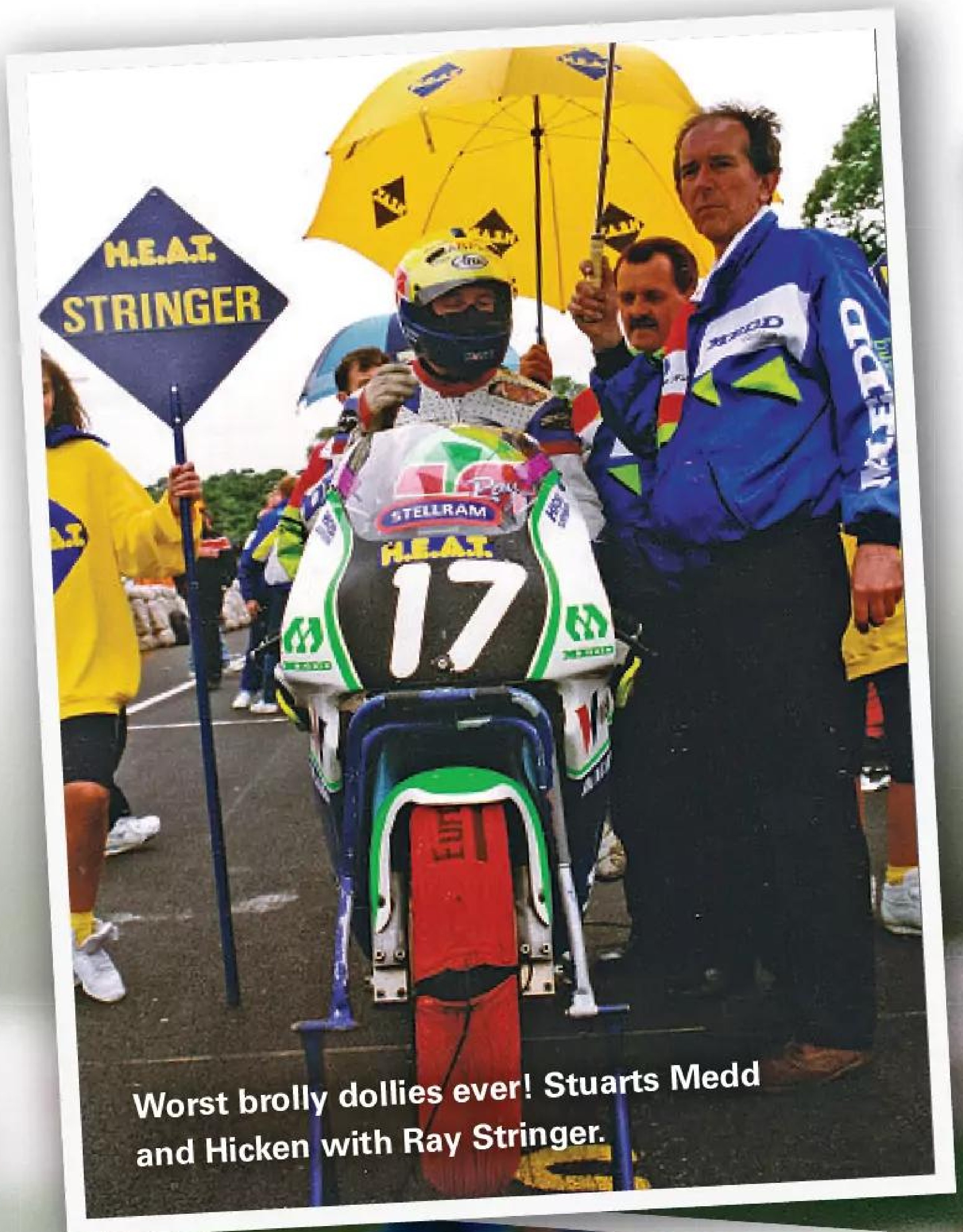
As is so often the case, even now, the bikes were so late in arriving we were still applying stickers in the pit lane at the first meeting and, as I'd thought, the RC45 chassis was poor. I'd suspected from those early photos that the swingarm pivot was in totally the wrong position and the reaction to the chain torque was horrendous. From the gearbox sprocket, the chain went uphill and over the spindle, so when you gassed it, instead of the rear trying to squat and give the tyre traction, it did the opposite and lost rear grip. They call it anti-squat and some bikes use it even today.

Stringer couldn't stop on the bike, nobody could, though we got over the bad chassis to a certain extent with Robert Dunlop on the roads, by using a big spring and loads of sag. To improve the handling, we also used the biggest sprocket on the front we could find, because with that I was effectively altering the distance from the sprocket to the swingarm spindle.

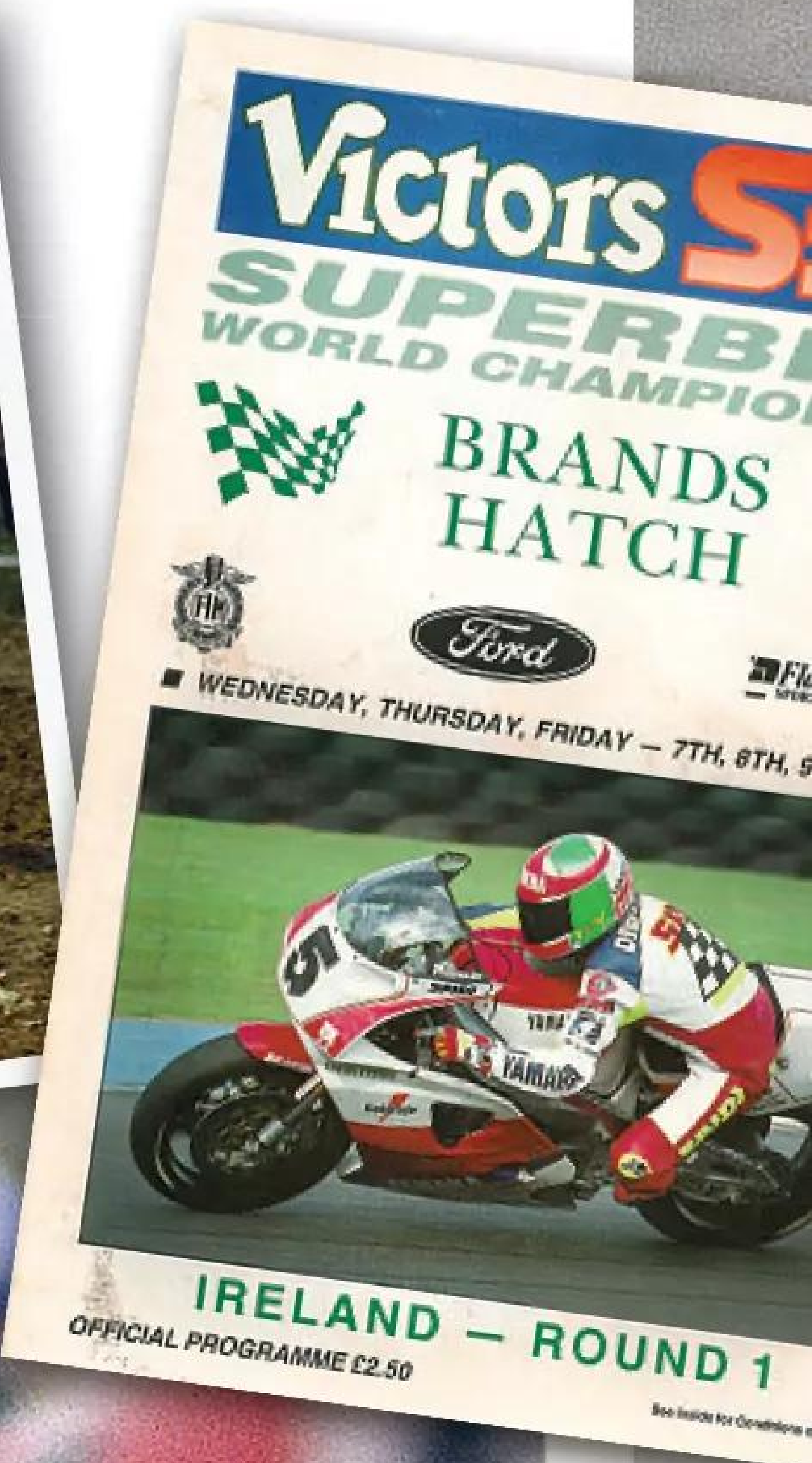
Fiddling round with suspension for years was paying dividends and Robert was in really high spirits at the North West 200. He pinched his brother's arse at just under 200mph during practice and he was so relaxed that come the first race he wasn't even there! I was sweating. One minute to go and still there was no Robert. Thirty seconds to go and there's still no sign, so I run back up to the truck to find Robert's sat there, putting his gloves on, one finger at a time. I was in a right panic: "Robert, there's only 30 seconds before the start!" He just looked at me with that cheeky grin of his and said: "Aye, but they'll not be starting without me!"

He went out and won three races. He wiped the floor with everyone, including Joey, and a week later we had an even more surprising win. Against all the odds, James Haydon won at Snetterton. It was a miserable wet day so to try and get some traction I'd resorted to some cutting-edge technology, which you're unlikely to see in BSB today. I'd added four brand-new drive chains, duct-taped to the inside of the seat hump for Robert, and three for James, to stop the arse-end from coming up.

In the race Rutter was leading on a Ducati but James was catching him hand over fist,


Worst brolly dollies ever! Stuarts Medd and Hicken with Ray Stringer.

Vladimir Kavinov, Maggiora 1980 on WP suspension.



RUTTE
17
MEDD

5
Norton
EBC

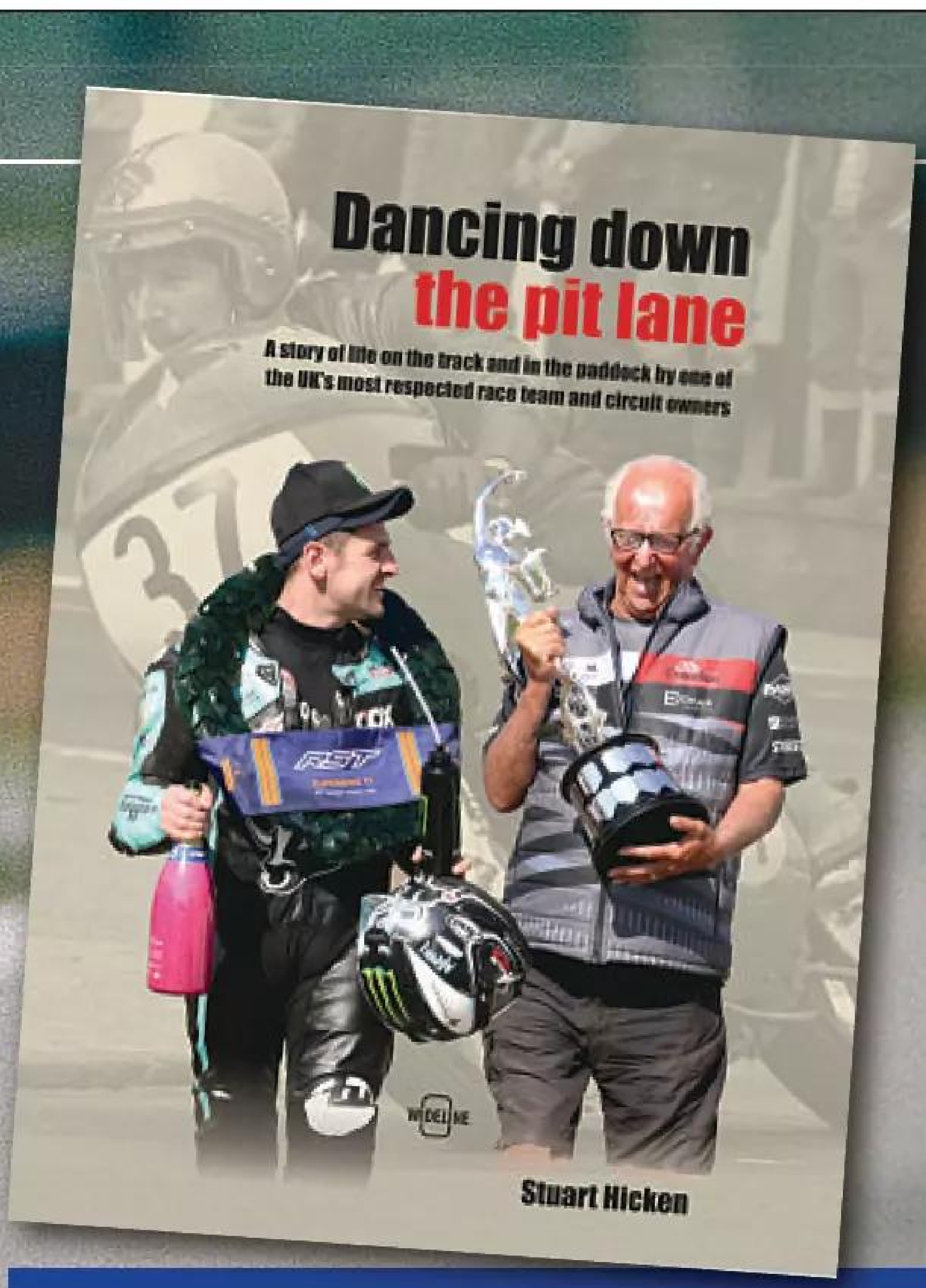
SHARPLES
STELLRAM
17
MEDD

ABOVE LEFT: Michael Rutter and Ray Stringer.

LEFT: Stuart would help out with the Norton project.

MAIN: Stringer exits the Mallory Park Bus Stop Chicane.

You couldn't say James Haydon wasn't trying hard on the RC45!



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The 1995 Reve Racing team: Hicken, Chris Anderson, Barry Stanley, Sean Greer. Barry Stanley and mechanic Sean Greer.

took the lead and just cleared off. Everyone was thinking he'd crash any minute, but he didn't and when the race got stopped early, due to the conditions, I loved race director Stuart Higgs for all of one minute. James was 20-years-old at the time and it was only his third meeting on a Superbike.

Tragedy at the TT

Off the back of that we had high hopes for the TT, but sadly, as you'll probably know, on the fourth lap of the F1 race Robert crashed heavily at Ballaugh, in an accident from which he'd never fully recover. It was one of the worst moments I've had in racing. The ins and outs of the accident have been well documented but what's less well known is that I'd been asked to do some experimental work with Penske suspension at the time. When Robert went missing, the reports coming back were that the rear-end of his bike had collapsed. I'd machined the internals of that rear shock. I sat there, shattered, thinking that the accident had been due to my error.

When the news finally filtered through that the rear Marvic wheel had collapsed it was like seven articulated lorries had been lifted off my chest, though of course, it made no difference to poor Robert. It could have been worse too, as in the same race we had Michael Rutter out, riding for us on a one-off basis. When he pitted for fuel, on our other RC45, he was complaining about dodgy handling.

At the time we had no idea what had caused Robert's crash, so not being able to see anything, we sent him on his way again. We were horrified later when we checked the rear wheel and found cracks on his spoke webs, identical to those found on Robert Dunlop's.

Unfortunately, wheels were the story of that season. James Haydon was smashing them with gay abandon on the British circuits so that by the time we were due at Knockhill, Stuart Medd pulled the plug. We literally had no wheels left, but James came to me and said: "Do you think you can borrow some wheels and talk Stuart into letting us go? I'll be really careful." So, I borrowed a couple of sets of wheels off Joey and we went, but I read James the riot-act beforehand and told him: "We can't afford any more crashes 'coz I'm on a wing and prayer here with Stuart Medd."

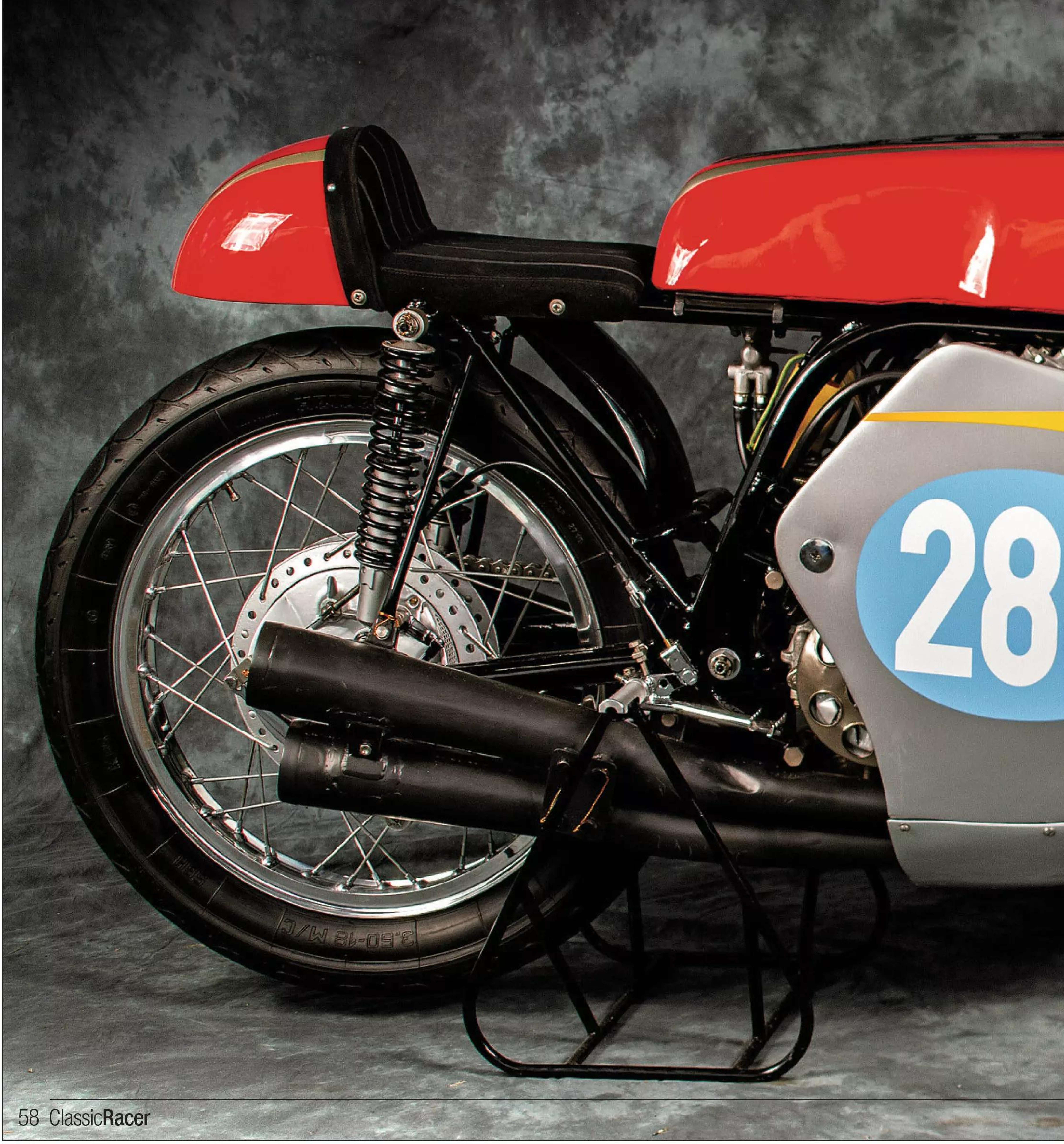
When the race started, he came by mid-pack. "Good," I thought; "…he's being sensible!" Then, the next lap, the pack goes over the crest down towards the first corner and I see the yellow flags. "Oh god, please don't let it be him!" I start to walk to the first corner, by the karting track, and I see him walking towards me, leathers tied around his waist. My heart sinks, and when he comes by me, he just says, with a completely straight face: "Stuart, I think we should have gone two clicks on the front." I couldn't bring myself to speak. The engine was out of the frame. The bike had cleared the catch-fence and it was absolutely wrecked, along with Joey Dunlop's wheels.

The real issue that season wasn't James' bravado though. It was that the official Honda team weren't even running a standard frame on their RC45 Superbike. The bike John Kocinski was riding in WSBK that year, it was nothing like an RC45, but allegedly the guy overseeing things then, Steve McLaughlin, just turned a blind eye.

What got Stuart Medd's goat though was that Honda wouldn't even share computer codes allowing us to make more detailed set-up changes to the engine, so we never even contested the last meeting at Brands Hatch.

Stuart had had enough, but for me as one door was closing another opportunity dropped in my lap. What we'd achieved, as new kids on the block, must have raised a few eyebrows, as Ben Atkins approached me about Reve Racing and said: "Are you interested in managing my team in World Superbike?" CR

1962 HOND



Words: Vince Rank **Photographs:** Terry Joslin

A RC170

When Honda arrived in the Isle of Man for the 1959 TT they were met with derision and laughter. Nobody took them seriously and they didn't set the world on fire. But they learned valuable lessons. Two years later they returned to the Isle of Man and the laughing stopped. The first five positions in the 125cc Ultra-Lightweight and 250cc Lightweight races were all Hondas. Both races were won by a young British rider and future legend Mike Hailwood. The world of motorcycle racing was about to change completely and Honda would soon expand their racing operation into other, larger capacity classes…

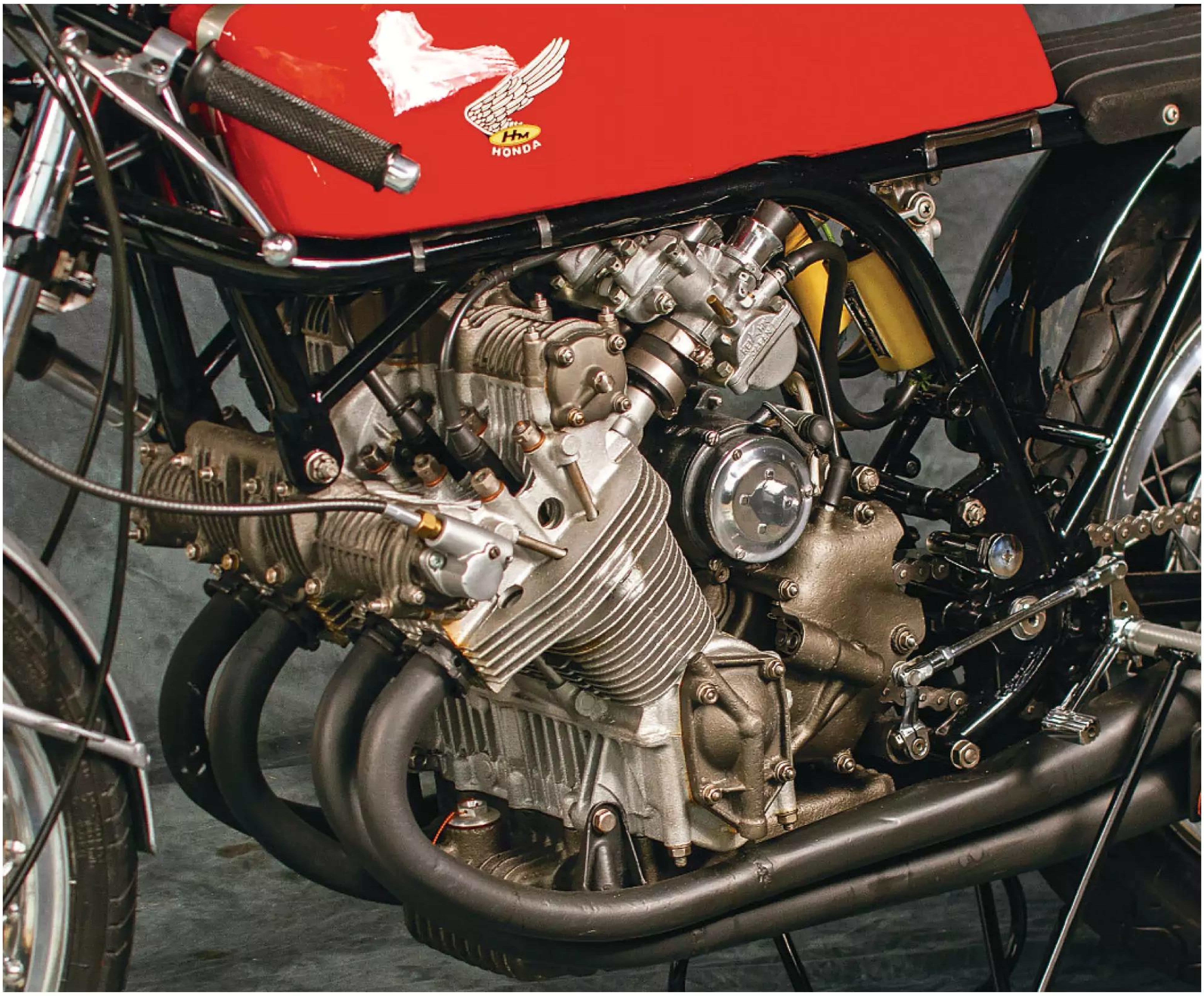
HONDA
HONDA
5

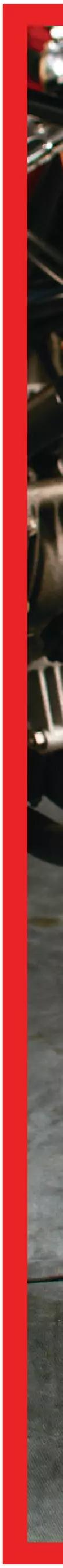
LEFT: In 1961 Tom Phillis went on to win the 125cc World Championship and Hailwood took the 250cc title. Hailwood didn't have an official works Honda contract, but his father Stan pulled a few strings and got Mike the ride on the RC161 four-cylinder works machine.

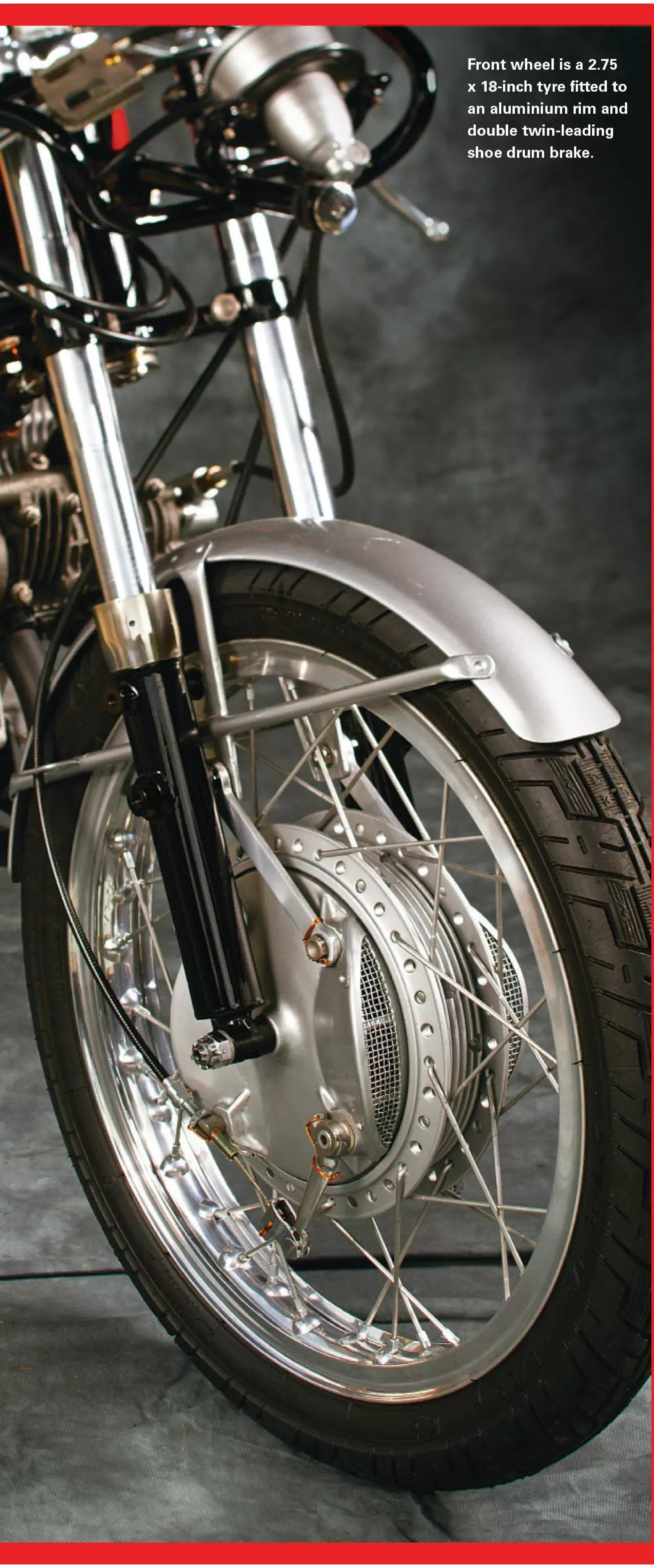
For the 1962 season there would be a new 250, the RC162, but although the new chassis was ready, the engine was not, so they used the all-conquering RC161 engine in the RC62 chassis until the new engines became available. With Hailwood signing with MV Agusta for 1962, Honda had a new rider, Jim Redman, to lead the charge.

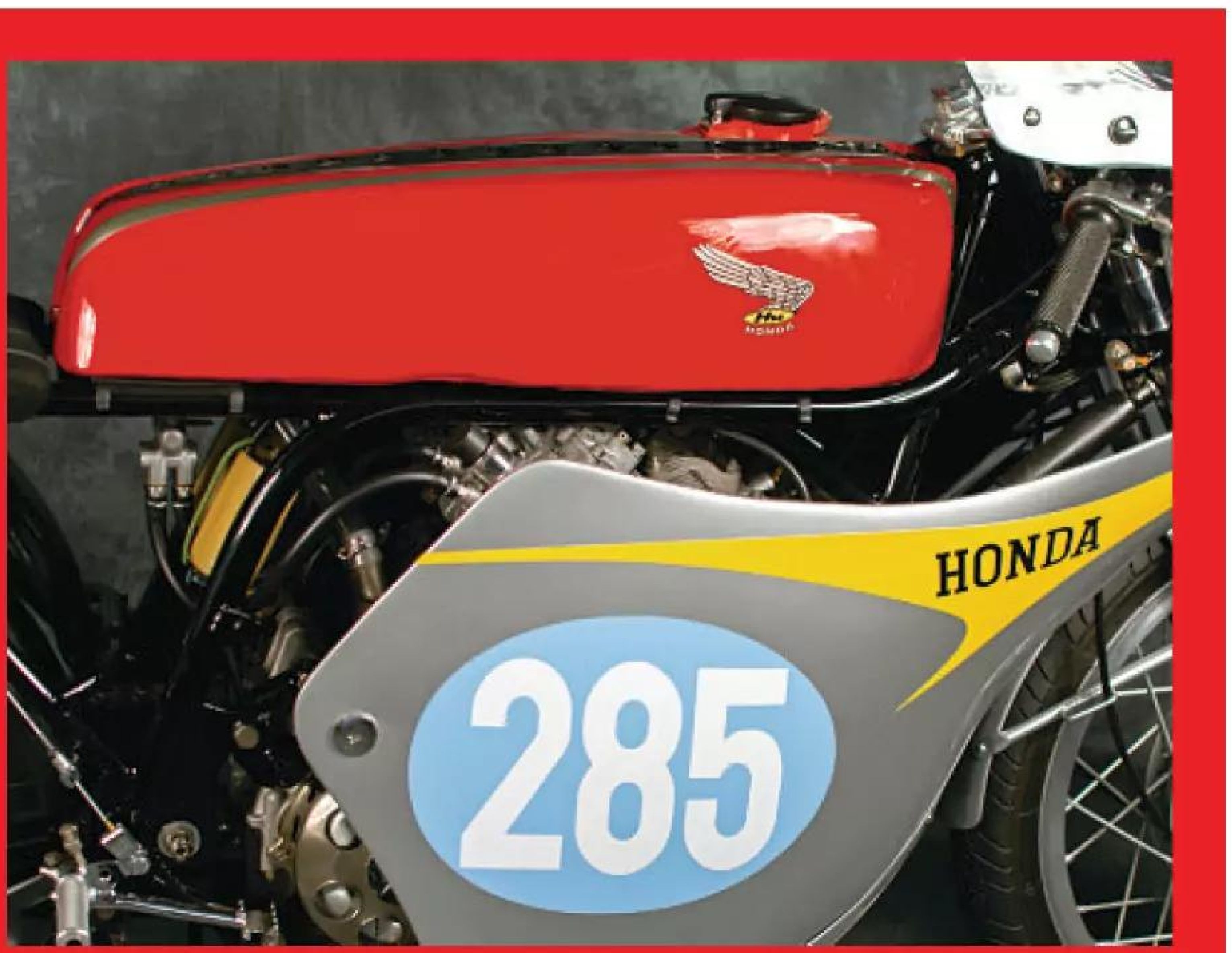
BELOW: Having won the 125 and 250 titles in 1961 Honda decided to enter the 350cc class in 1962, the only problem was they didn't have a 350cc engine. A new 49mm x 54mm was being developed in Japan but wouldn't be ready for the start of the season.

They simply over-bored the 250 by 3mm which took the capacity out to 285cc while they were waiting for the new full 350cc engine from the factory. These hybrids were used for a few races until the new 350 engine was available. It meant that the works riders could now compete in three classes and not two, very important in those days when riders received start money. Soon Honda would field the most machines and have the largest presence in the paddock.

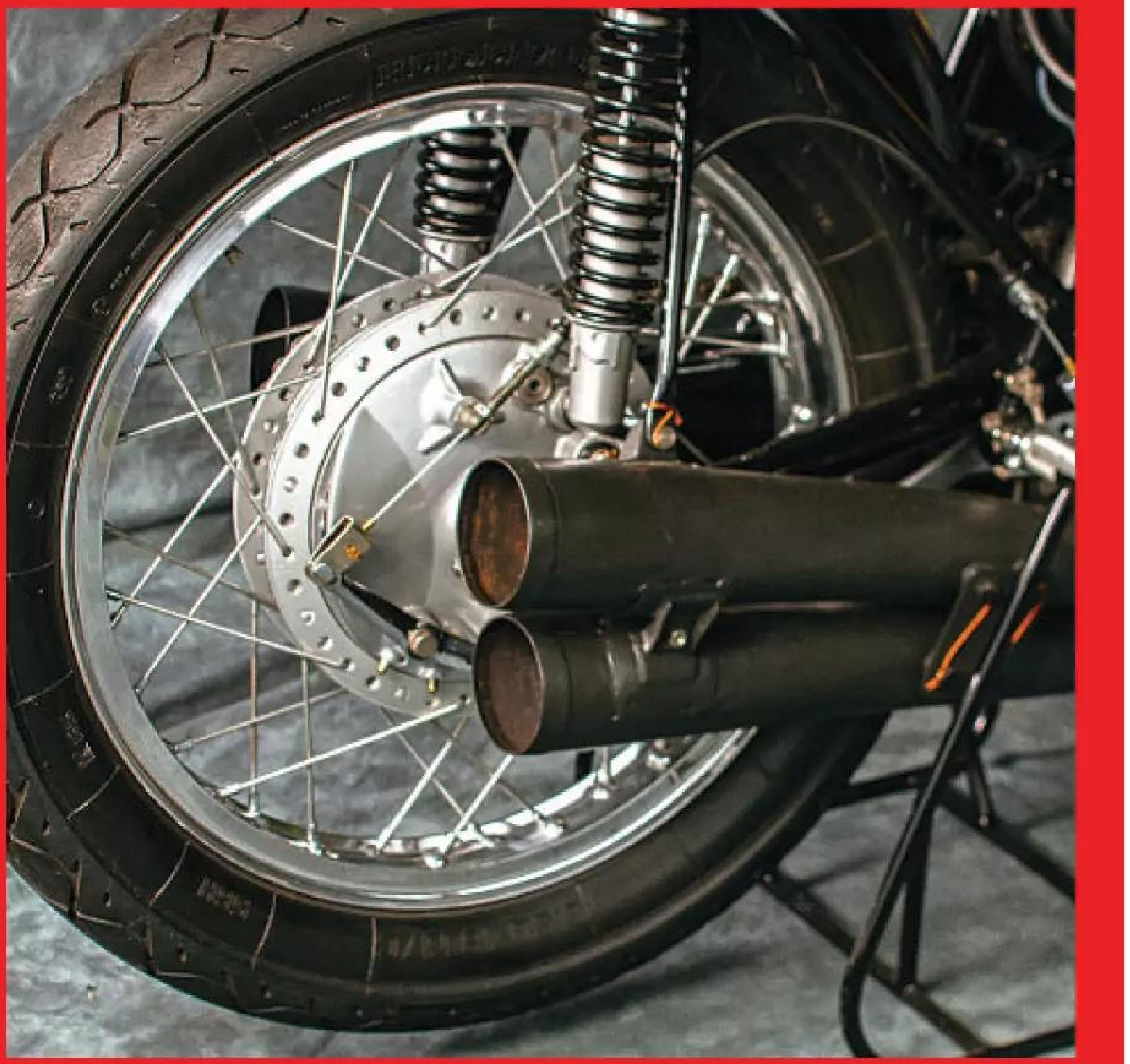


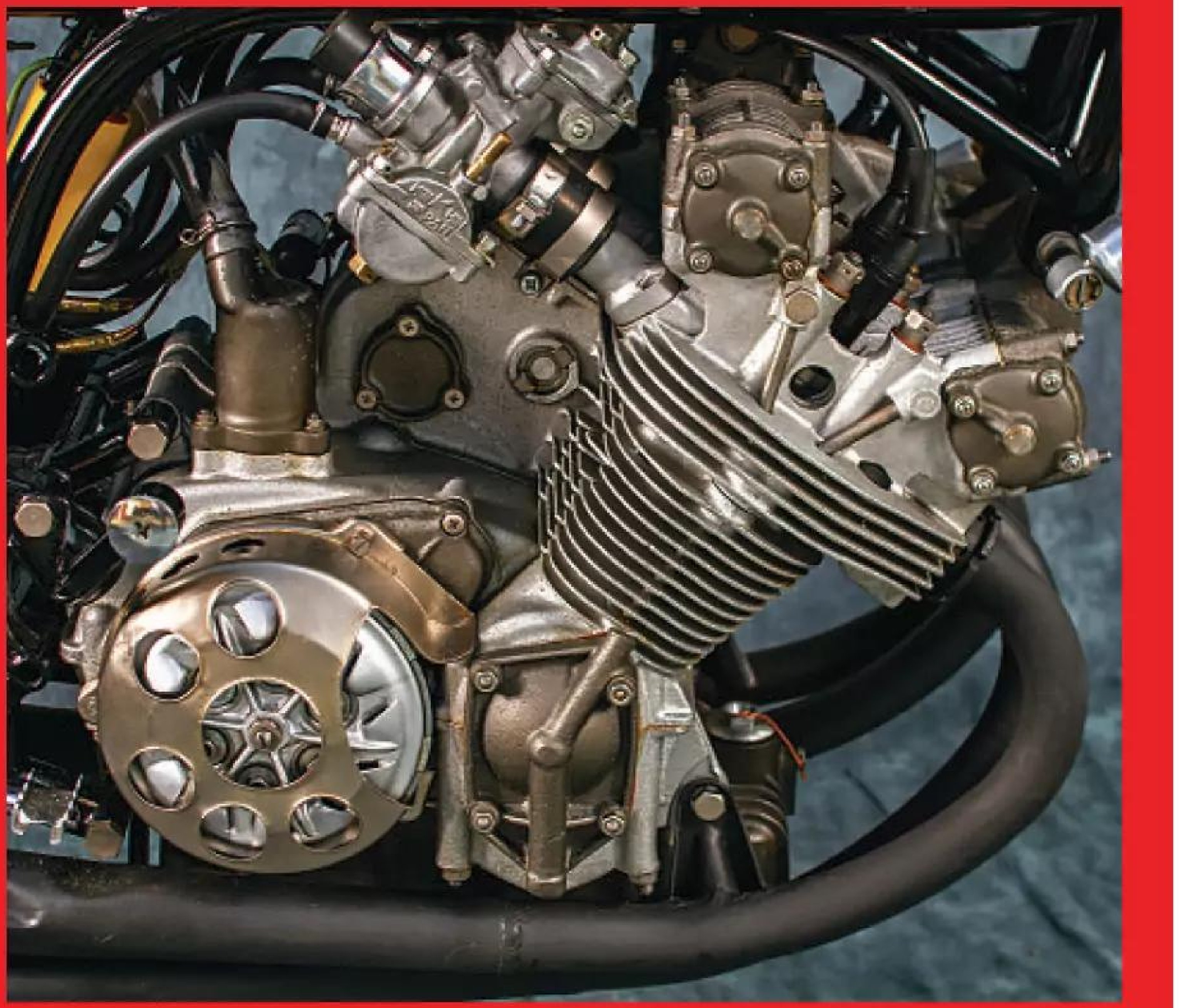



Front wheel is a 2.75 x 18-inch tyre fitted to an aluminium rim and double twin-leading shoe drum brake.

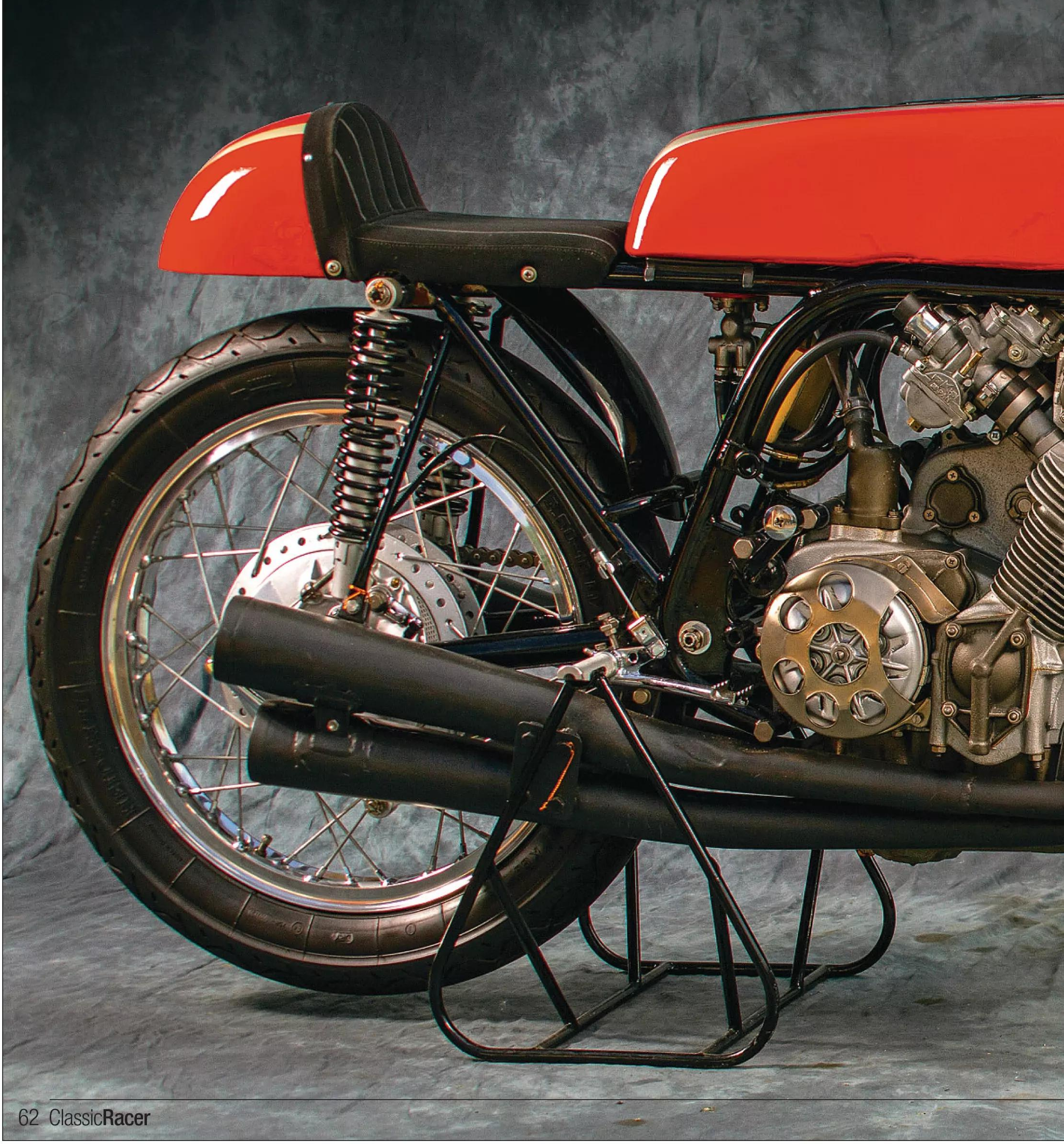


Fairing is a work of art, shaped and hand beaten in aluminium.

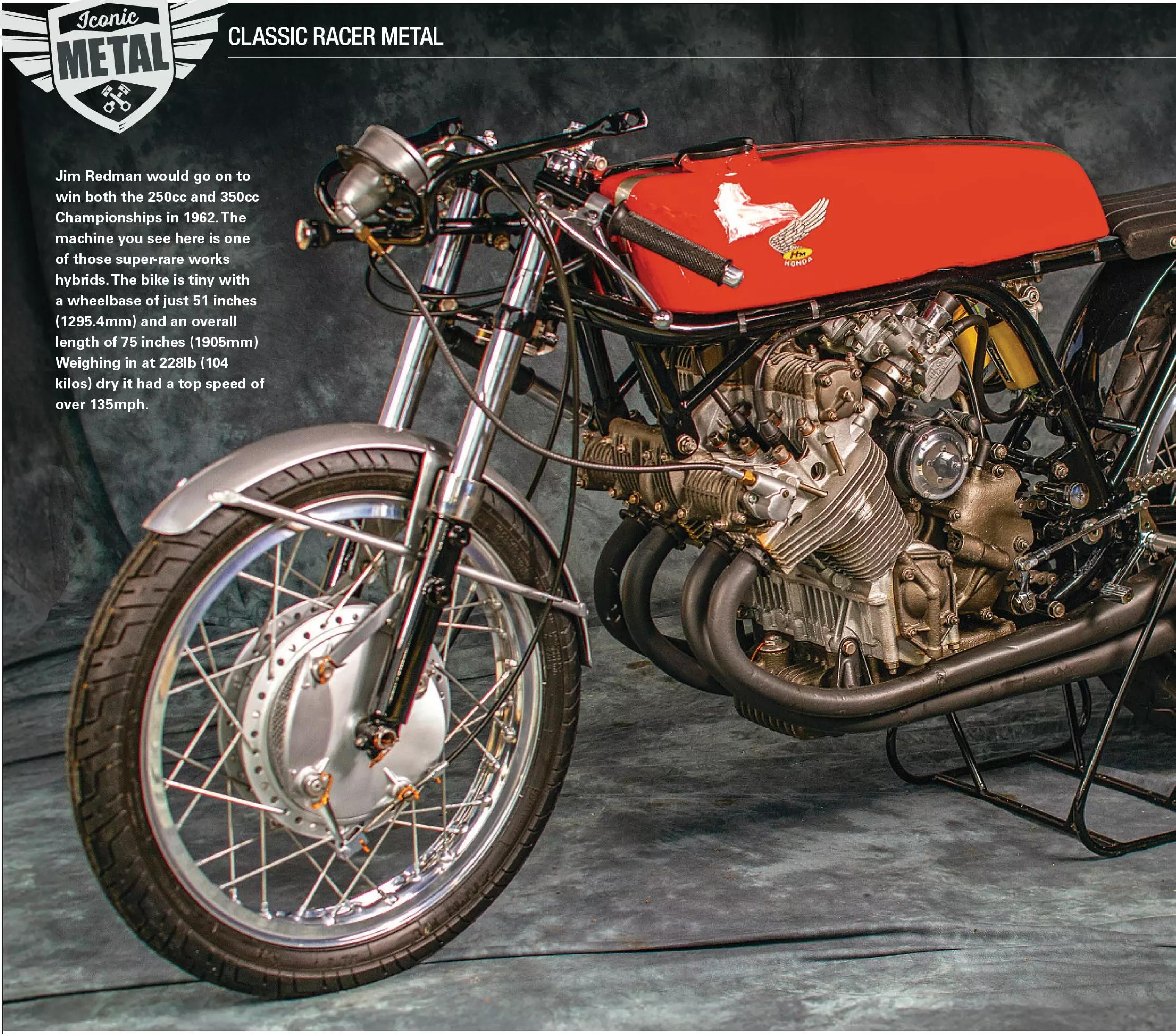

Rear wheel is an aluminium rim with a 3.00 x 18-inch tyre fitted, with twin-leading shoe drum brake.


The four-cylinder DOHC engine is tilted forward to allow downdraft for the Keihin flat-slide carbs and engine features a grooved oil pan for improved cooling. There is a central gear-train to the twin overhead camshafts and the clutch is a multi-plate dry unit. Gearbox is a six-speed close ratio cluster.

> “HONDA HAD ALREADY SEEN THAT THEIR 250CC MACHINES HAD THE BEATING OF MANY OF THE 350CC COMPETITION. SO, THEY CORRECTLY ASSUMED THAT A 3MM INCREASE IN BORE SIZE FROM 44MM TO 47MM WOULD GIVE 285CC, PUSHING POWER UP FROM 45BHP TO 52BHP @ 13,000RPM. THIS



MEANT THE 285CC RC170 WOULD BE MORE THAN COMPETITIVE IN THE 350CC CLASS. IT WOULD PROVE TO BE ONLY A STOP-GAP WITH THE 339CC RC171 COMING INTO USE AT THE ULSTER GP OF 1962. JIM REDMAN WOULD ULTIMATELY TAKE THE 350CC TITLE FOR HONDA IN THAT YEAR."



Jim Redman would go on to win both the 250cc and 350cc Championships in 1962. The machine you see here is one of those super-rare works hybrids. The bike is tiny with a wheelbase of just 51 inches (1295.4mm) and an overall length of 75 inches (1905mm) Weighing in at 228lb (104 kilos) dry it had a top speed of over 135mph.

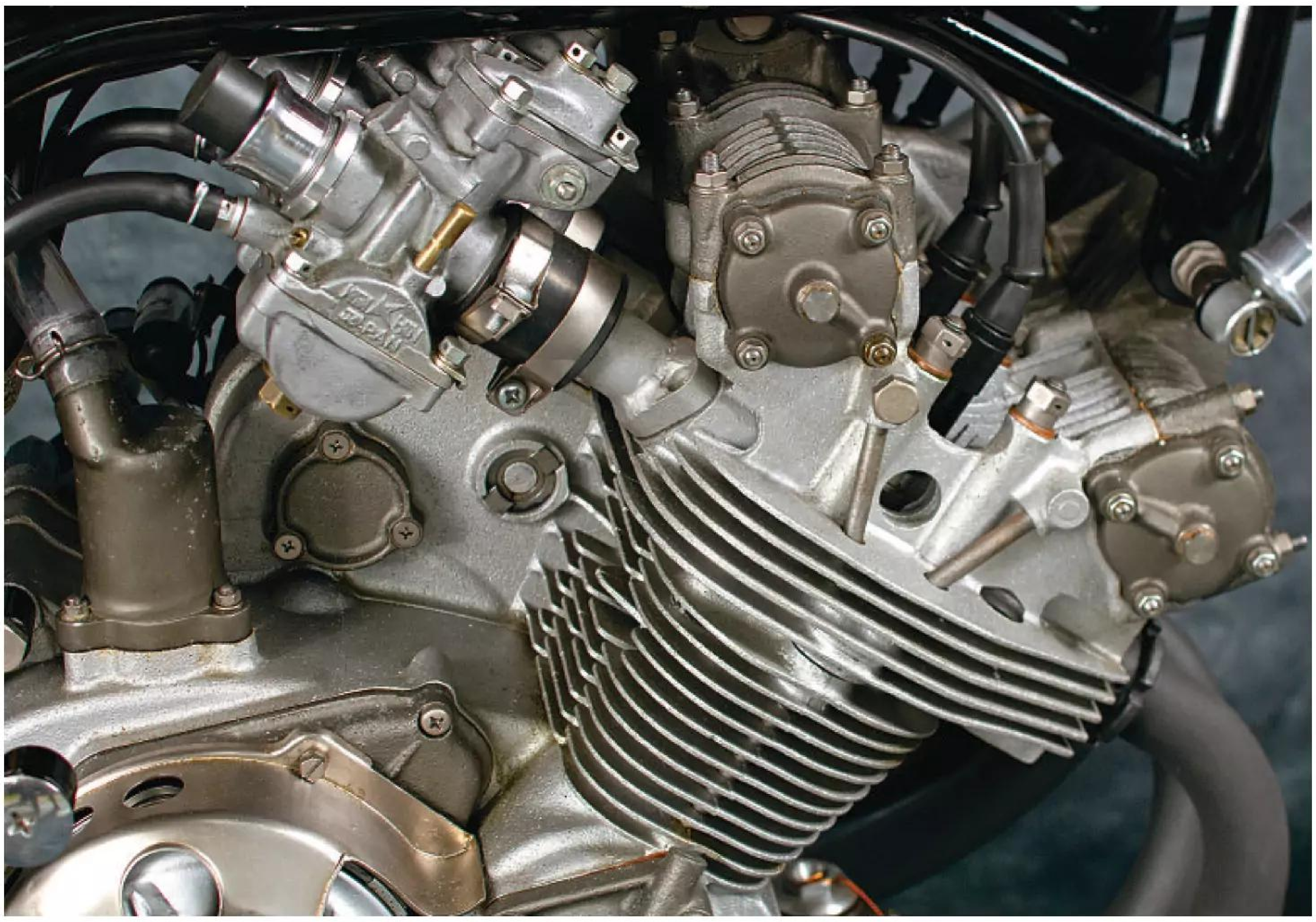
The rev-counter on the RC170. Power was 52bhp @ 13,000rpm

The long smooth fuel tank is a Honda trademark on their 1960s race bikes…

…along with the slim seat and rear hump. You had to be small and slight to sit on a factory RC!

Exhaust system is pure 1960s: four megaphones and not a silencer in sight!

As usual on Honda's factory racers the attention to detail is superb.



The 285cc machine was replaced by the Ulster round of the World Championship and it didn't have the cooling issues the later RC171 would initially suffer from. Redman would win four races on his way to the 350cc title, as well as taking the 250cc title with six wins. He'd also be runner-up in the 125cc title fight behind Honda team-mate Luigi Taveri and in front of Tommy Robb.

FIRST

Barry Sheene took the first of his 23 500cc Grand Prix race wins 50 years ago this year. It was also the first for Suzuki, and the first of an eventual 49 wins for the iconic RG500. What made it even more special was Sheene's near-death experience at Daytona just a few months earlier. This is the story of the Grand Prix win that made Barry Sheene a superstar.

Words: Stuart Barker **Photographs:** Mortons Archive, Don Morley/Hitchcock Archive

BATES
Winnaar 500 cc
UKI

Sheene celebrates his first (and Suzuki's) ever 500cc race victory.

MICHELIN
Castrol

Barry Sheene got the fright of his life when he first rode Suzuki's new RG500/XR14 in 1974…

"I was the first rider ever to be allowed to try it – I felt privileged," he said, many years later. "But after doing one lap of the test track I had to stop and think about it, because it was so violently fast. It was just an incredible projectile. Over 150mph it would zig-zag six feet either way up the main straight of the test track."

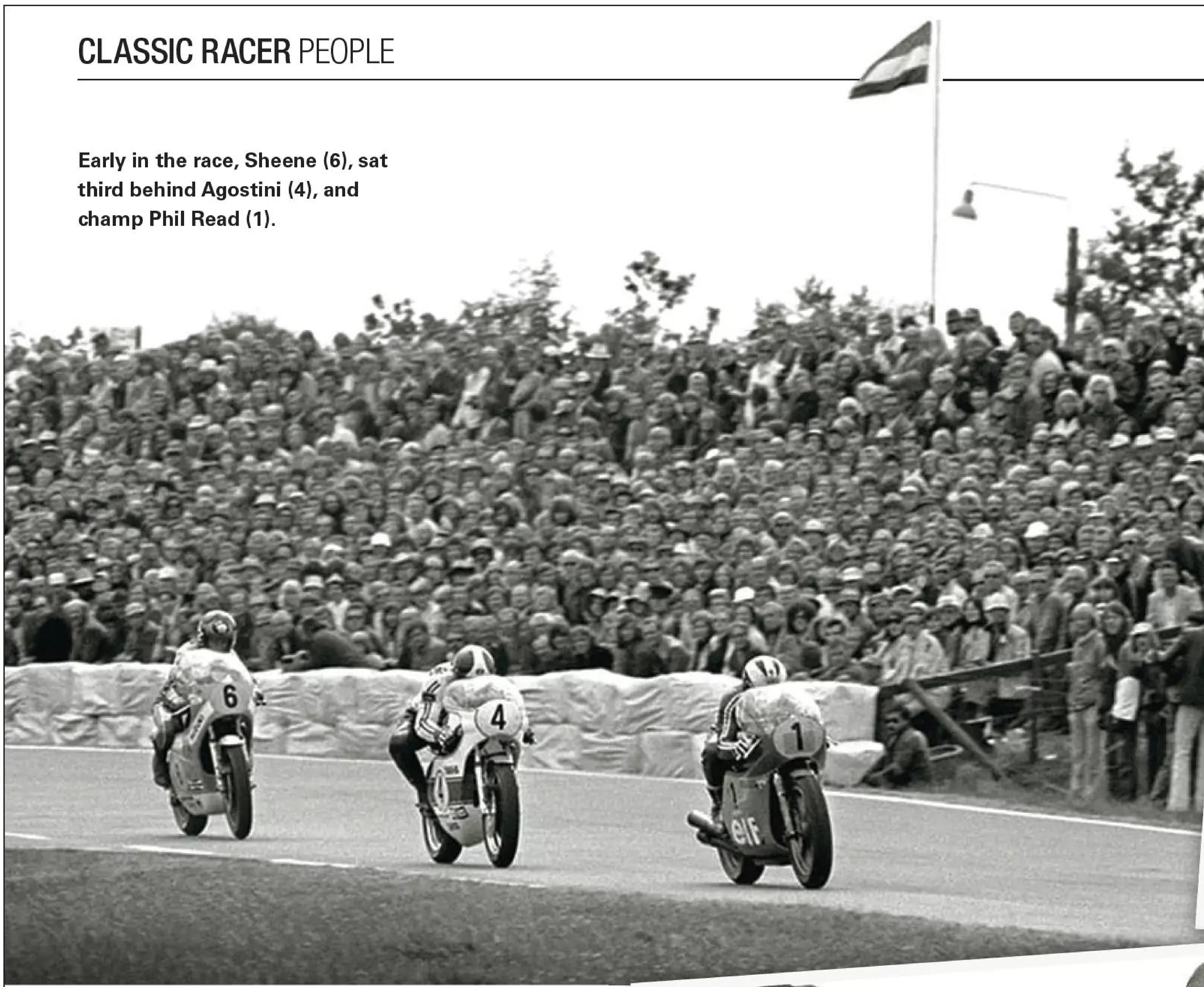
The speed was there, but there was clearly a lot of work to be done to make the square-four RG500 rideable (the bike is actually an XR14 – RG500s were production models, while Suzuki's factory racers always had an 'XR' designation, but most people refer to them all as RG500s now).

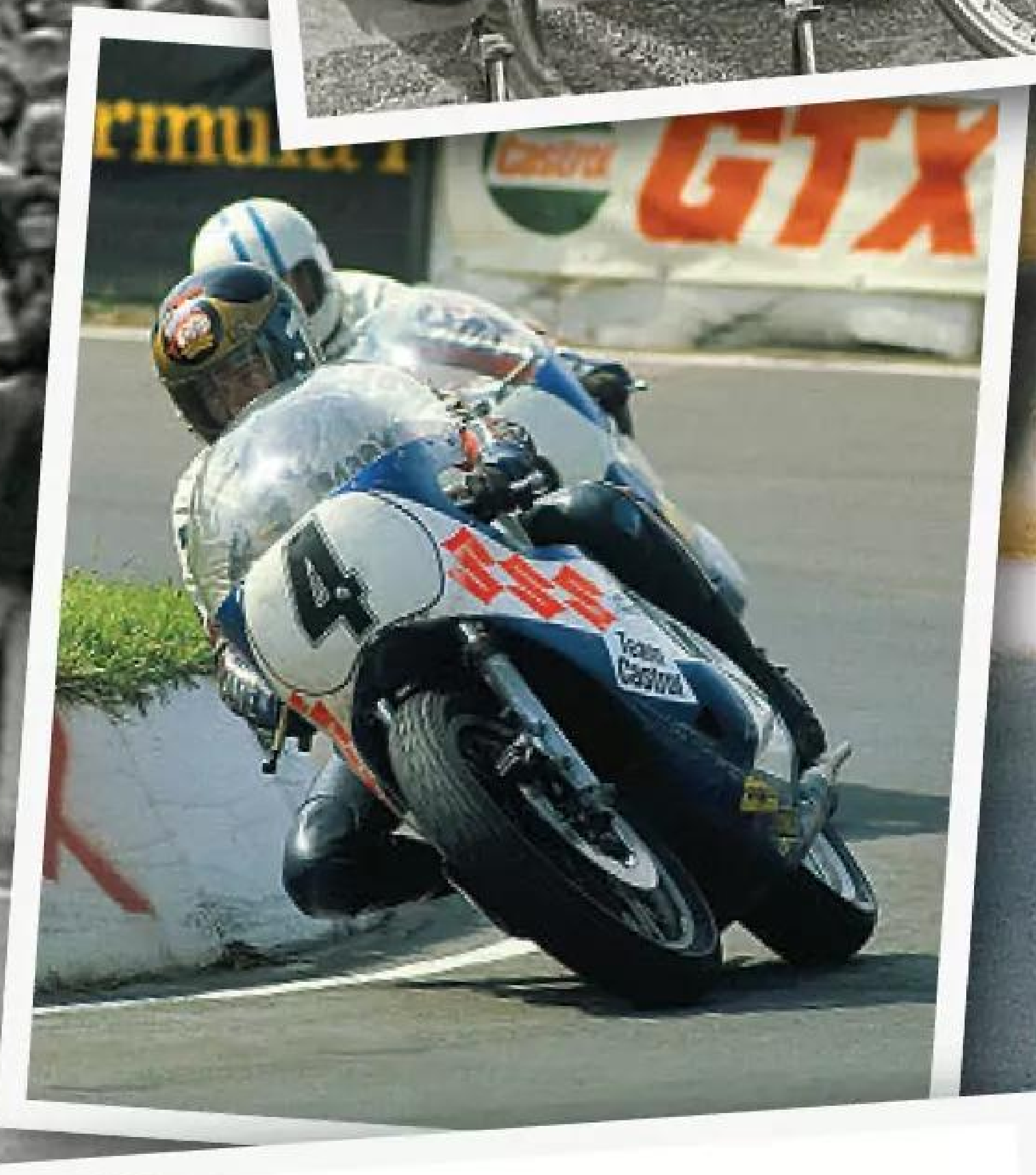
By the time it turned up for the first Grand Prix of the 1974 season – at Clermont-Ferrand in France – Sheene's XR14 had been somewhat neutered; detuned from 100bhp to 90bhp to broaden the powerband. The original open-cradle frame would also be replaced mid-season by a full loop frame in a bid to further improve the bike's wayward handling. The 1974 French round was only Sheene's second 500cc Grand Prix. His first had been in 1973, riding a Suzuki XR05 twin – little more than a glorified road bike – at Imatra in Finland, but he failed

OF THE MANY

MICHELIN
KING
MASHE
SUZUKI
SUZUKI
KING HELMETS
6
6
CHAMPION
RENOLD

Early in the race, Sheene (6), sat third behind Agostini (4), and champ Phil Read (1).





Barry would have a long association with Suzuki: albeit a fragmented one!

ABOVE: The cheeky chappie on the podium is congratulated...

to finish the race. Now mounted on the XR14, he scored a sensational 2nd place behind MV Agusta's Phil Read.

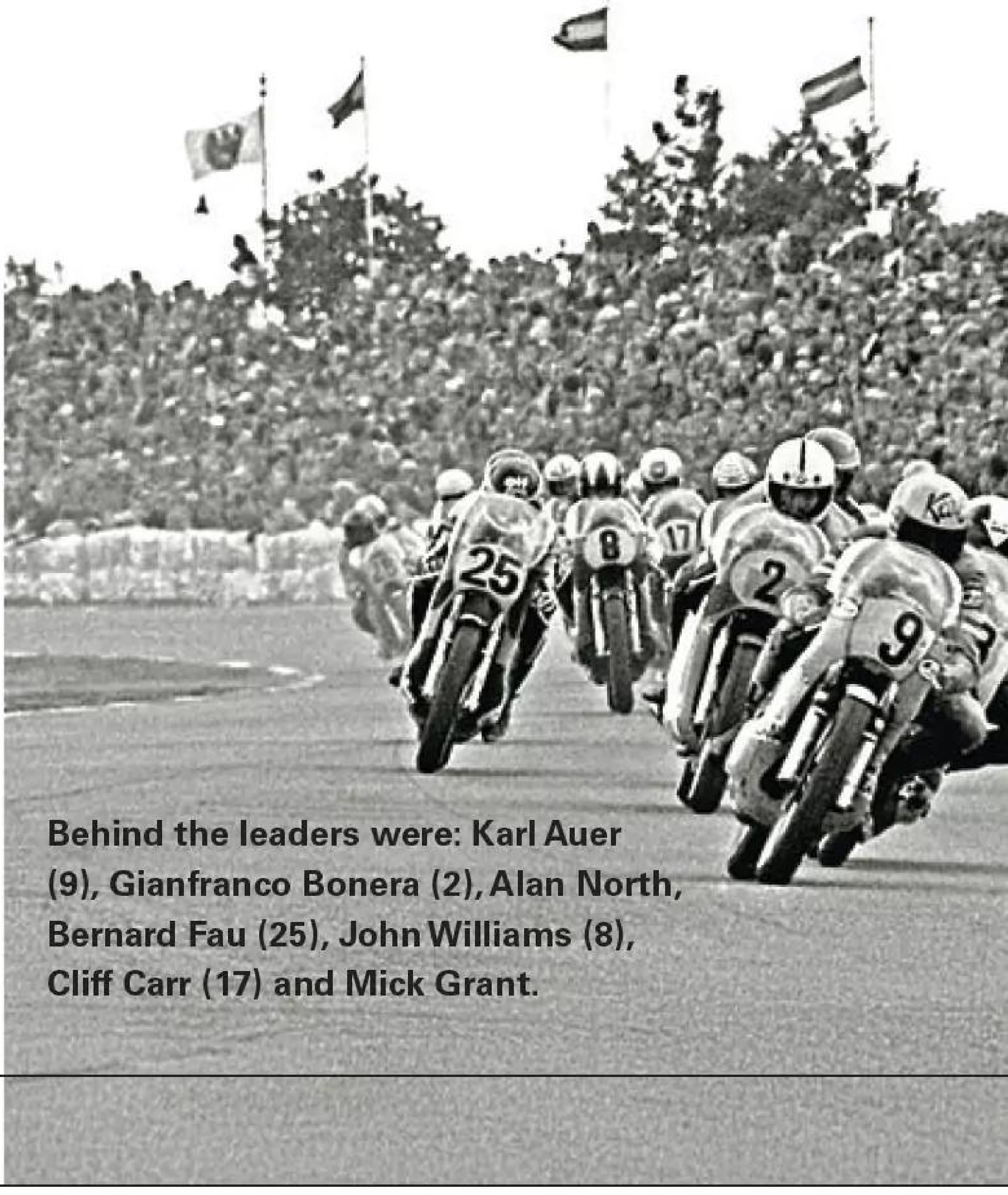
But the result flattered the bike; the XR14 was still an absolute animal, so much so that it almost led to Sheene quitting the sport before his career had even taken off. He had written to Suzuki, asking if his great friend – top American racer Gary Nixon – could test the bike. Suzuki agreed, but during the test Nixon's bike seized and he was struck by test rider Ken Araoka and seriously injured. Sheene blamed himself – and the XR.

"I was so cut up about what had happened to my old mate that I gave serious thoughts to quitting racing," he said. "If it had not been for me getting Gary fixed up with a 500, the whole sorry incident would not have taken place. That seizure on his Suzuki, which was an almost identical bike to mine, left me short of 100% confidence with the bike. Would I suffer the same fate? What were the chances of my Suzuki locking at speed? As this was still largely an experimental year for the 500-4s, those questions did crop up in my mind from time to time."

The bike's first win came at the non-championship British Grand Prix at the end of 1974 (at that time, the Senior TT counted as Britain's round of the 500cc Grand Prix world championship), but it was still a fearsome beast to ride. Sheene explained: "Its handling never improved. Gearboxes and drive shafts would break, and I was thrown up the road many, many times through mechanical failure."

Suzuki was hugely discouraged and was on the verge of abandoning the whole project, but despite the bike trying its best to kill both him and his mate, Gary Nixon, Sheene recognised the bike's potential and offered to fly out to Japan to help develop the bike and dial out its nasty habits. By the end of five gruelling weeks, he was satisfied that he had a machine which could challenge for Grand Prix wins: he had tamed the beast.

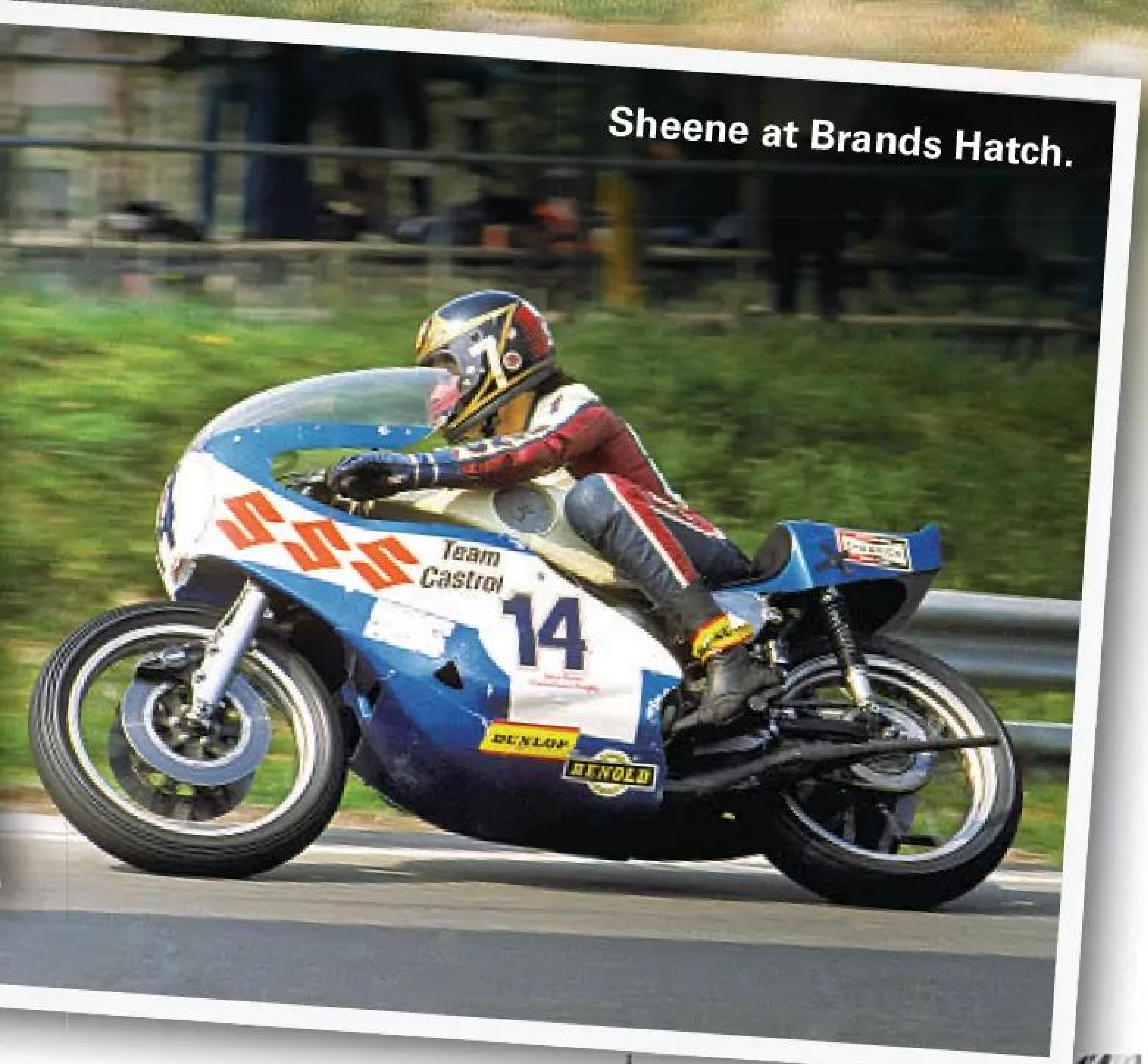
Before the 1975 Grand Prix season got



Behind the leaders were: Karl Auer (9), Gianfranco Bonera (2), Alan North, Bernard Fau (25), John Williams (8), Cliff Carr (17) and Mick Grant.

7
SUZUKI
BATES
KING

Despite a terrible start to 1975 at Daytona, the year would prove to be pivotal...



Sheene at Brands Hatch.

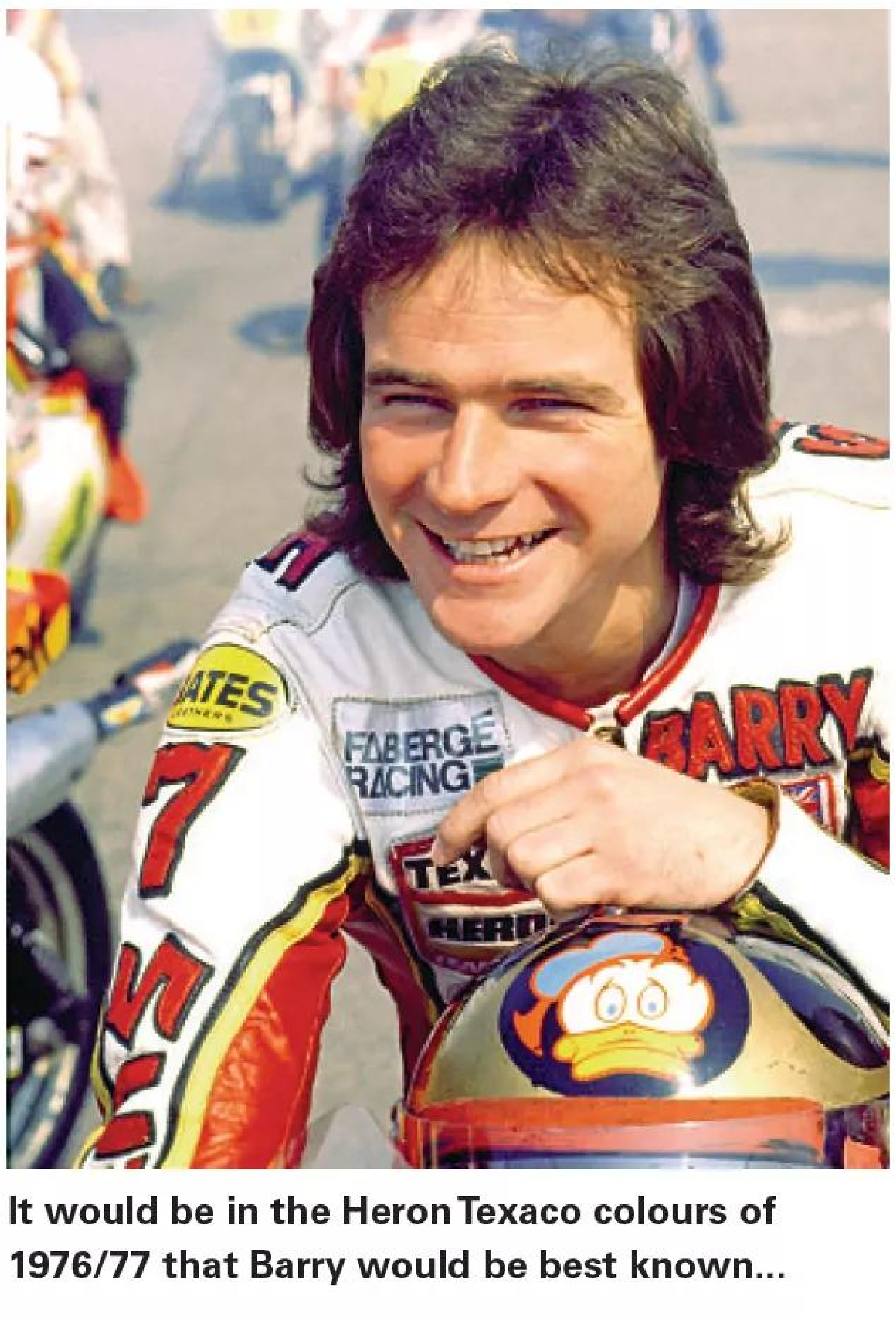
under way, the world's best riders headed to Daytona for the traditional season-opener. The Daytona 200 was one of the most important races in the world at the time, and a vital warm-up for the Grand Prix season ahead.

During practice, as he was riding a Suzuki XR11 two-stroke triple, powered by a heavily tuned GT750 motor (Daytona ran to Superbike rules), Sheene's rear wheel locked up on the Daytona banking, throwing him up the track at 170mph. As an up-and-coming British rider, Sheene had a Thames Television crew with him, following his every move for a documentary. The footage they captured of the crash made it onto the main news channels in the UK, making Sheene a household name overnight. No one had seen anything like it before; it was brutal. It hurt, too. Sheene broke his left femur, his right wrist, his right forearm and collarbone, and six ribs. He also suffered compression fractures to several vertebrae and lost enough skin to 'upholster a settee', as he later quipped.

Sheene's injuries were so bad he was forced to miss the first three races of the 1975 Grand Prix season. He returned for the fourth round in Germany but suffered a DNF with the still-fickle XR14. The same thing happened at the Italian Grand Prix and, with the TT being the next round of the championship, he sat that one out (Sheene had raced at the TT in 1971 but famously vowed never to return).

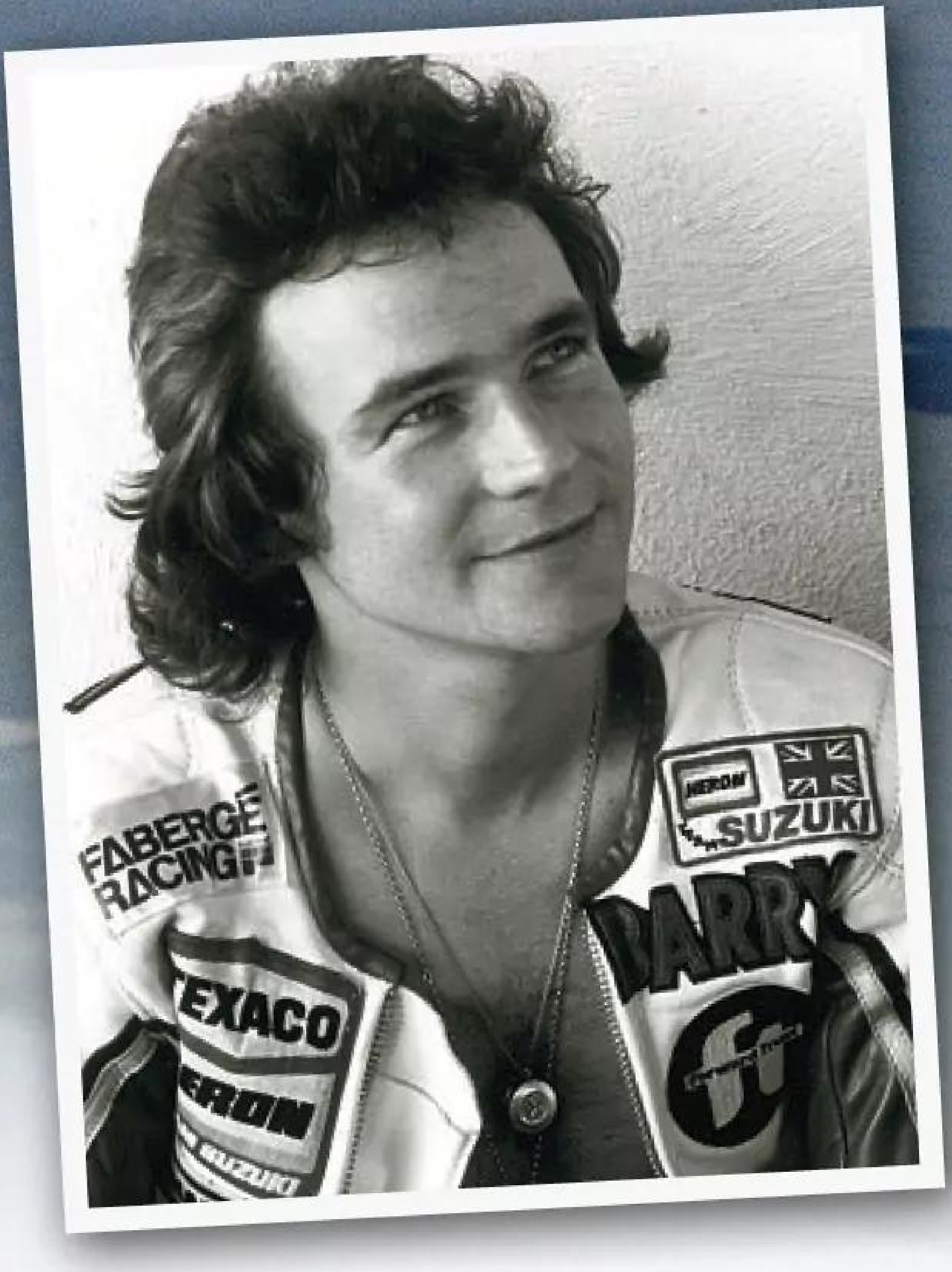
The sixth round of the championship was held at Assen in Holland, and this time the Suzuki behaved itself. Sheene was only 24 at the time, and while he had won 125cc Grands Prix (he finished second to Angel Nieto in the 1971 125cc world championship), he had yet to win in the premier class. Facing the young Londoner off was the most successful motorcycle Grand Prix rider in history – Giacomo Agostini. By season's end, the Italian superstar would have 15 world championships to his name, and by the end of the following year, he would have notched up an astonishing 122 Grand Prix victories across the 350cc and 500cc classes. No motorcycle racer on earth had more experience – or more wins and titles – than Agostini.

Yet Sheene eclipsed the old master in practice by setting pole position, despite the fact that he had to plug the hole left



It would be in the Heron Texaco colours of 1976/77 that Barry would be best known...

Barry in action in the summer of 1975 on the Suzuki TR750.



By 1976, Barry was on the cusp of greatness and on the verge of a world championship.

1975 saw Barry meet future wife Stephanie.

BELOW: 1976 Suzuki squad: Percy Tait, Sheene, John Newbold, John Williams.

by an extracted wisdom tooth with cotton wool before heading out for practice. It was Sheene's first 500cc pole position.

In the race itself, the young Sheene displayed all the race craft of a seasoned veteran. He repeatedly made a point of showing his front wheel on the right-hand side of Agostini's bike as the pair negotiated the final right-hand corner before the start/finish line. This was merely a ruse to fool Ago into thinking Sheene was going to overtake him on that side towards the end of the race. As a consequence, Agostini began taking a tight line into the chicane to protect his right-hand side from attack. Sheene, however, waited until the very last lap before passing Agostini on his left-hand side, which the Italian rider had left open with his defensive line.

Sheene's faster exit speed from the corner allowed him to win the drag race to the line and he crossed it first in front of 150,000 screaming fans, many of whom had made the ferry trip across from the UK to cheer on their home-grown hero. It was an emotional moment as Barry pulled in at the end of pit lane, removed his famous Donald Duck helmet and hugged his father Franco in the sweltering Dutch sunshine. They had come a long way, the father and son team, from a quick test run at Brands Hatch seven years earlier. Now they had reached the very pinnacle of the sport they both loved, the 500cc world championship, and Barry had broken his duck in the premier class, the only class that really mattered.

It was a magnificent victory, especially as it had come just three months after Sheene had suffered such devastating injuries at Daytona. After Assen, Sheene suffered a DNF at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium, then took a second victory on the XR14, this time in Sweden, where he bested MV Agusta's Phil Read for the win. That second win was important in proving that Sheene was no one-hit-wonder, but the rest of the season was a write-off due to injuries and breakdowns. He had missed the first three races following his Daytona crash and then suffered too many mechanical failures to mount any kind of title charge.

Sheene had finished the 1974 season in sixth place, as the new XR14 had been almost unrideable. In 1975 it was more rideable, but those injuries and breakdowns meant

Barry borrowed a Rolls before buying his own! Above: 1975 team.

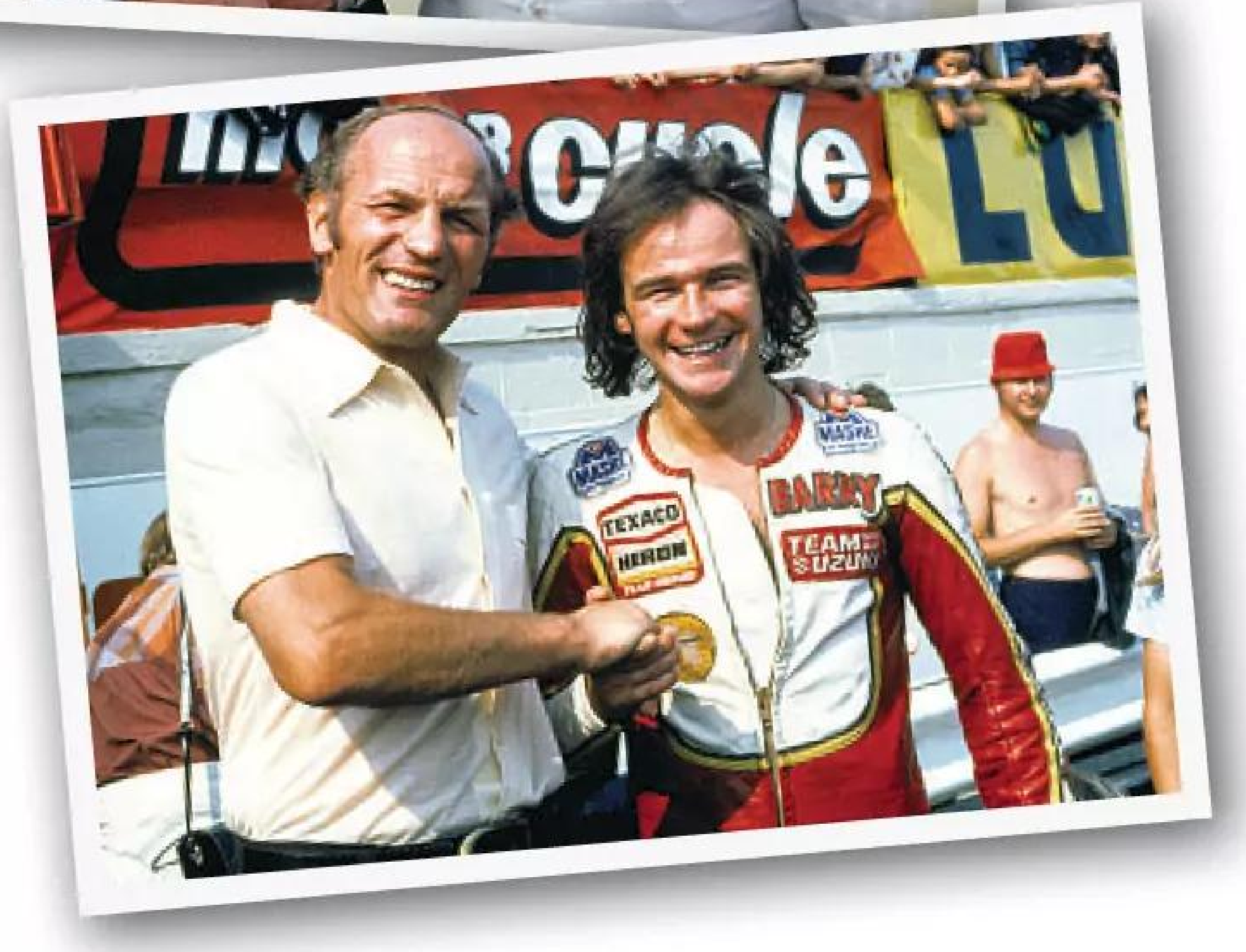
The Sheene Marketing Machine

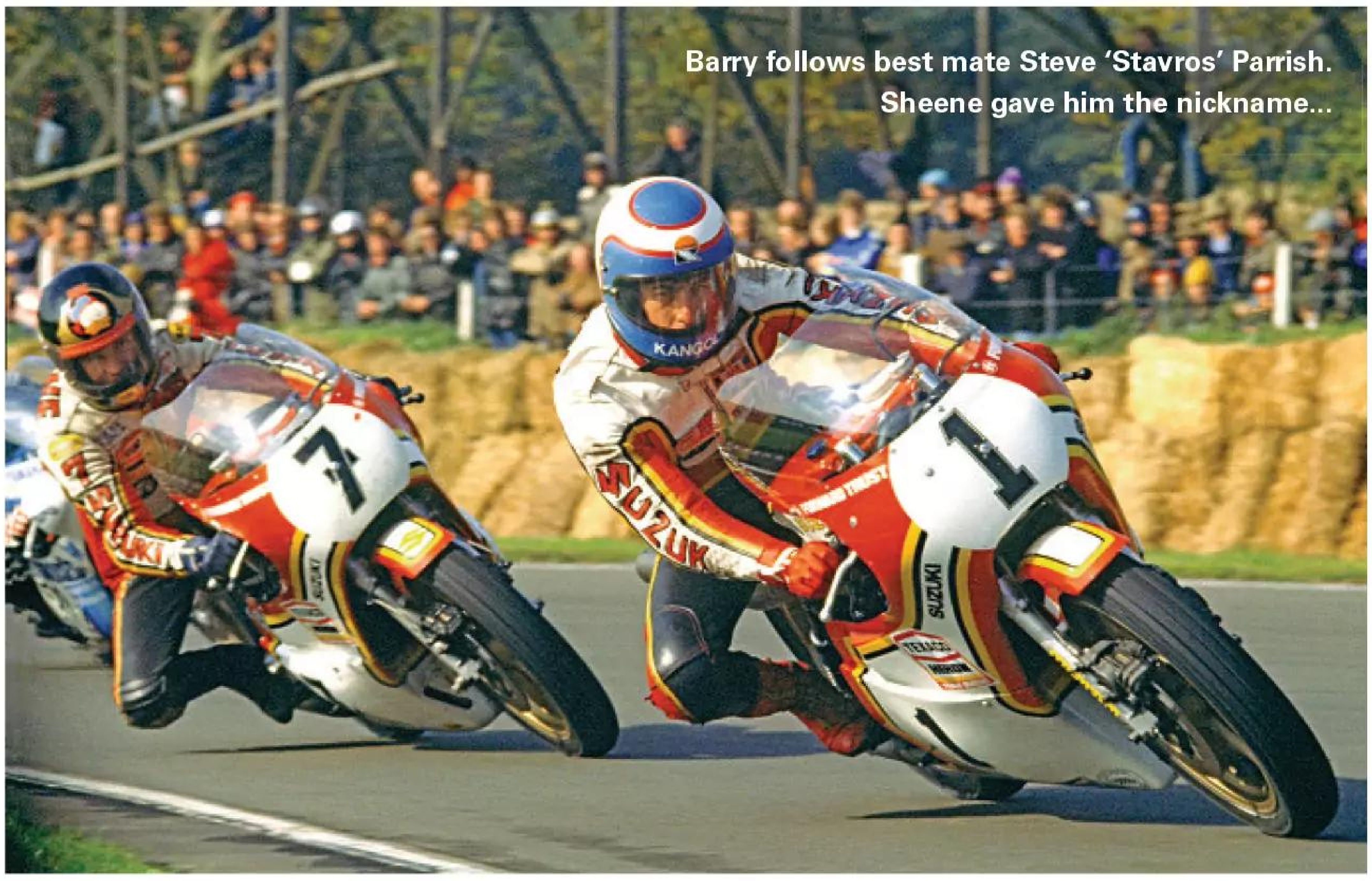
Another part of the Sheene Machine fell into place in 1975 when Barry Sheene chose Andrew Marriott to be his PR man.

"I first got involved with Barry in 1975 because I was one of the founding directors of a sports marketing company called CSS Promotions Limited," Marriot says. "We managed various people, including Stirling Moss, Mike Hailwood and James Hunt. James was great friends with Barry, so he recommended us, and I immediately got on well with Barry, so it all worked out nicely. It was great in 1976 because they were both world champions that year. We managed to do deals with Texaco and other companies for them both. We were responsible for most of the sponsors on Barry's bike – and we sorted the Akai deal out when he moved to Yamaha in 1980 too.

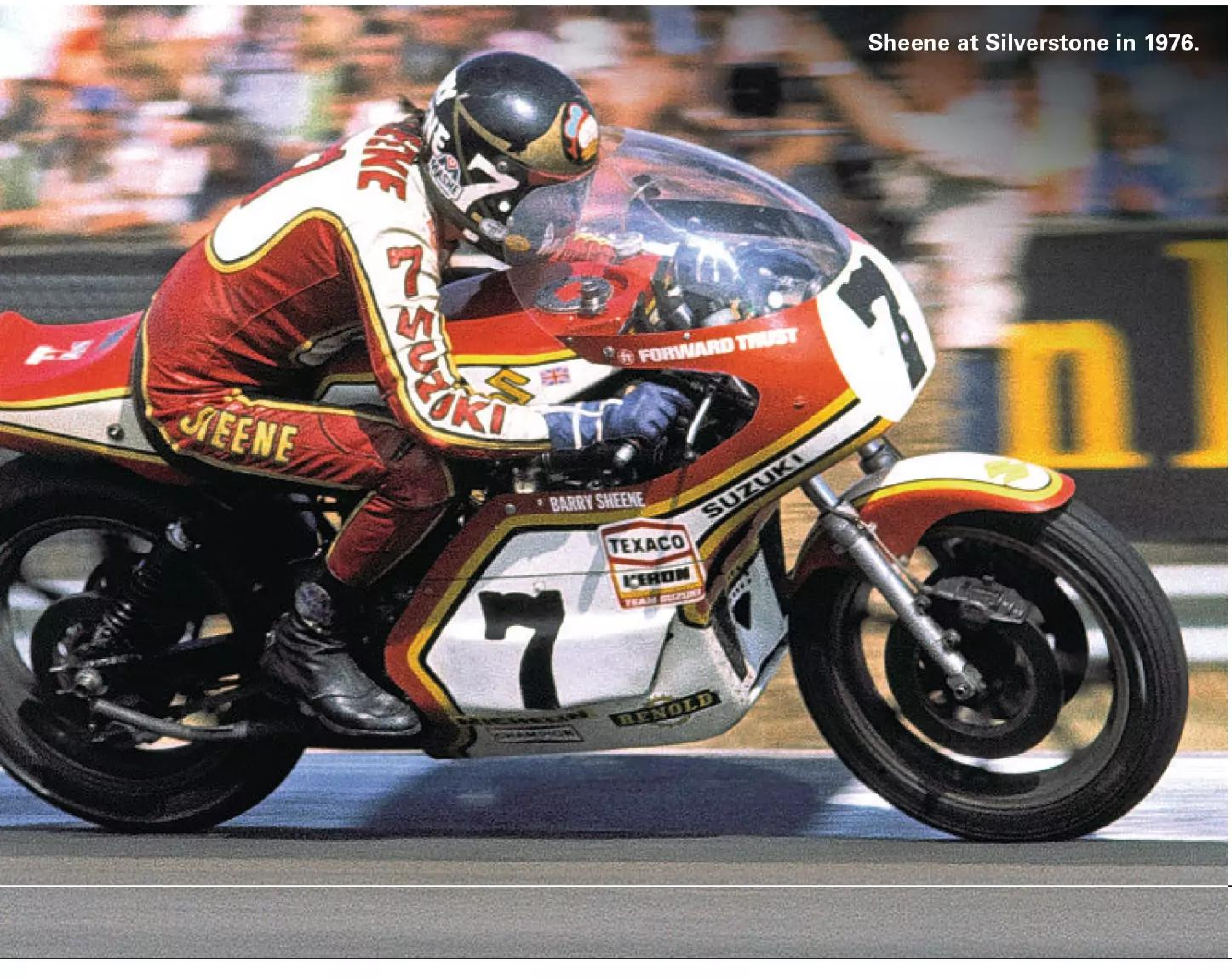
"We also did the Faberge deal, which was obviously famous for the Brut 33 television adverts that Barry did with Henry Cooper. Barry always managed the sporting side of things, so we didn't get involved in his contracts with Suzuki or any of that side. He did that himself because he was a bloody good negotiator."

To this day, Marriot says Barry Sheene was his favourite client: "I worked with a lot of people over the years – from Mario Andretti (me pictured with Mario, right) to James Hunt, Mike Hailwood and various footballers – but Barry was my favourite," he says. "James Hunt was frustrating to work with because he wasn't very reliable. Barry was very reliable and professional and, from a commercial point of view, he was brilliant. People argue about how good a rider he was, but as an all-round sportsman, there's no one beats him."





Barry follows best mate Steve 'Stavros' Parrish. Sheene gave him the nickname...



Sheene at Silverstone in 1976.

Sheene could only finish sixth overall in the championship again.

After his Swedish win, there were two more DNFs in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In fact, the 30 points he had taken for his two Grand Prix wins were the only points he scored all year. Two points-scoring rides from a 12-round championship. Even accounting for his deliberate avoidance of the British round (the TT), it was a disappointing season, in the championship, at least.

But that magnificent debut win at Assen – and his second win in Sweden – showed that, as a rider, he was ready. If Suzuki could build a more refined version of the XR14 over winter and if Sheene could avoid further major injuries, he was ready to be a title contender.

By 1976, Suzuki Japan had withdrawn from racing and left Suzuki GB to run its Grand Prix effort. Sheene still received 'special' bikes from the factory that were superior to his team-mate John Williams' machines; they weighed 8 kilos (18lbs) less and made 103bhp as opposed to 100bhp, much to Williams' chagrin. Sheene's bikes also had gas forks and specially made lightweight calipers which improved handling but, as he said: "I still had to ride the bike to the maximum. If all my rivals had been aboard the same works RG500 as mine, I'm positive the results would have remained the same."

Steve Parrish remembers the favored treatment Barry received as Suzuki's golden child. "Whatever he wanted from that motorcycle, the Japanese would do," he says. "Barry had a lot to do with head angles, offsets, seats, handlebars, where the gearshift was going to be – all that stuff. He was always sending telexes to Japan, asking for a new yoke or a different swingarm. His dad Franco did a lot of work bracing up swingarms and frames but generally anything Barry needed he would get Tady – his engineer back in Japan – to make for him. Only Barry received that kind of treatment. His team-mates just got what they were given."

For a few lucky and gifted sportsmen, there are years when they can do no wrong, when everything goes their way and their confidence increases with every victory, leaving their rivals with only the hope of finishing second at best. For Barry Sheene, 1976 was one of those years. He won the 500cc world championship, regained the MCN Superbike championship and the Shellsport 500 championship, and was voted MCN Man of the Year for a third time. On top of that, he was reported to have earned his first million, he started dating his future wife Stephanie, and he consolidated his position as the most famous motorcycle racer in history. Britain went Sheene-mad.

After all Sheene's struggles with the RG500, it had finally come good, and he was quick to praise the bike he had worked so hard to develop: "My Suzuki was something special and only once did it falter," (with fuel starvation problems) he said of the 1976 version. "Every other time it went beautifully, although we had to work continuously on the machines. There were, of course, plenty of items replaced, like gearboxes, through the season."

Chief mechanic Martyn Ogborne remembers 'working continuously' on Sheene's bikes that season. Oggy says: "Barry was very much involved with working on the bikes and very focused on how he wanted the bike set up. He didn't get so involved when we had the engine in a million bits, but he'd give us ridiculous lists of what he wanted doing to the bike. Sometimes there'd be 40 things on the list, and we only had an hour to work on the bike. I'd say: 'You're f*cking mad. We've got an hour – pick out your top 10, you prat!' He wanted eight hours' work in one hour!'"

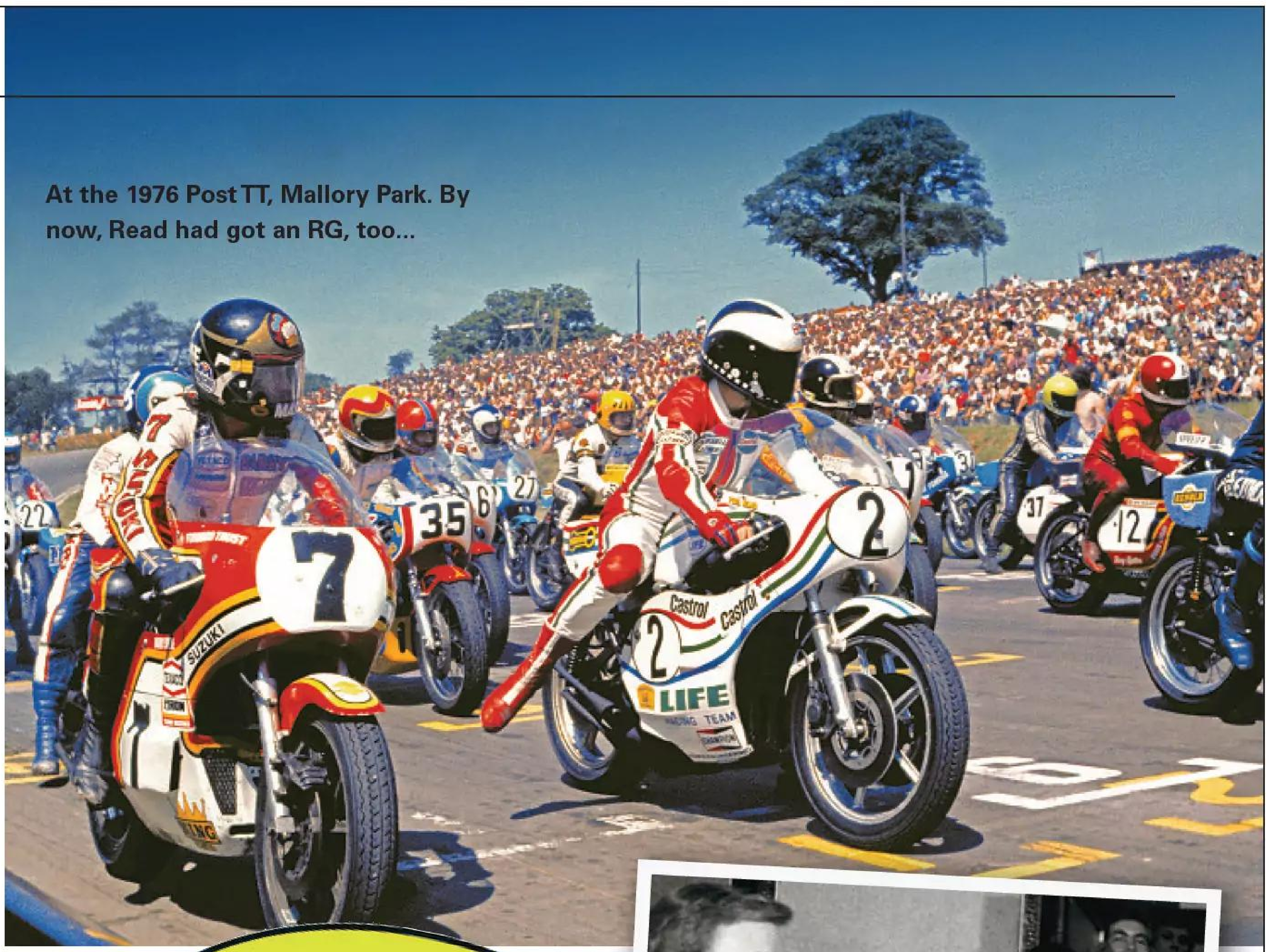
It worked, though. Almost 50 years later, Barry Sheene remains Britain's last premier class world champion, and one of the most popular motorcycle racers of all time.

And what of the bike itself? Well, you would think that a bike that's so important to Suzuki's racing history would be on show at Suzuki's HQ in Hamamatsu in Japan, but it's not. So where is it and what does it represent?

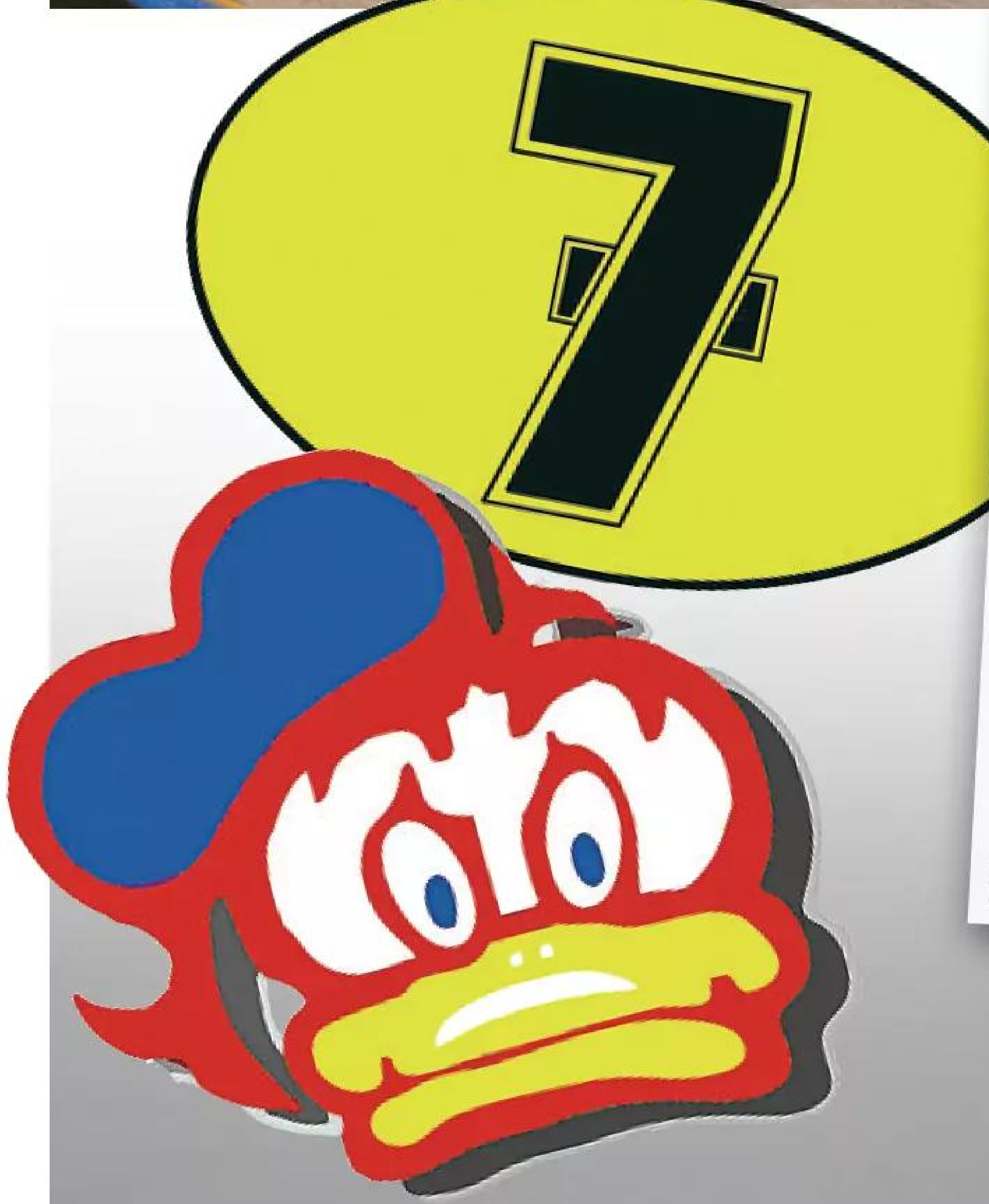
The XR14 was the first Grand Prix bike to deliver a genuine 100bhp (at 11,200rpm) and it had a top speed of 175mph. It was also the bike that spelled the end for four-stroke machines in the premier class. The RG500 raced at GP level for 13 years before being replaced by the RGV500 in 1987. It won four riders' world championships in the hands of Sheene (1976-77), Marco Lucchinelli (1981) and Franco Uncini (1982) and, more importantly to the manufacturers, took seven straight constructors' world championships between 1976 and 1982. The bike racked up a total of 49 GP wins, the last coming in 1982 when Randy Mamola won the German GP.

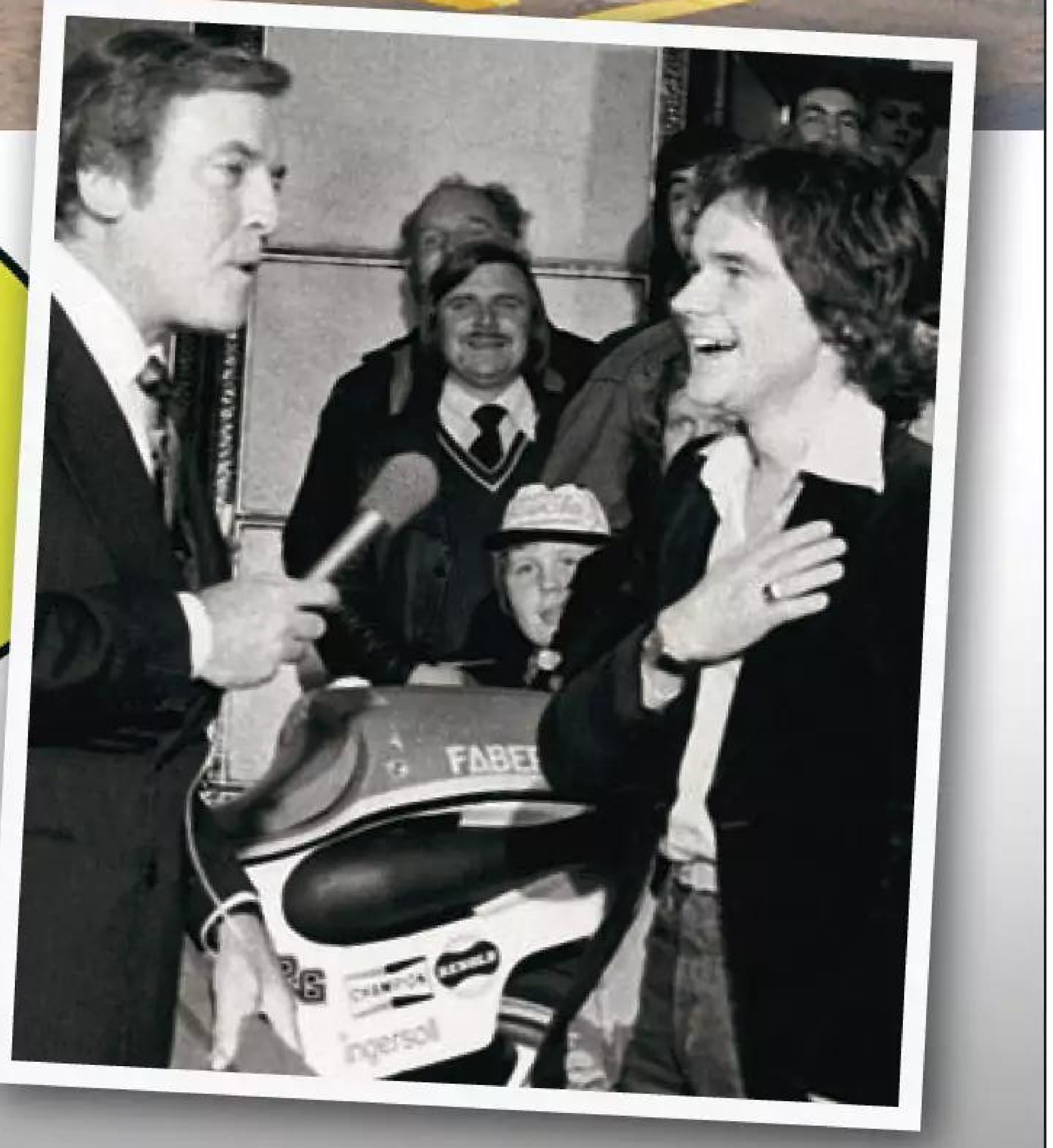
That first 500cc winning Sheene bike (chassis number G56-1026) has been owned by collectors Steve Wheatman and Chris Wilson at different times, it's now owned by an anymous collector and enthusiast.

Barry Sheene himself rode the bike at the Assen Centennial event in 1998 and confirmed it was the real deal, signing the fuel tank as an endorsement – that's some machine, and some man… *CR*



At the 1976 Post TT, Mallory Park. By now, Read had got an RG, too...

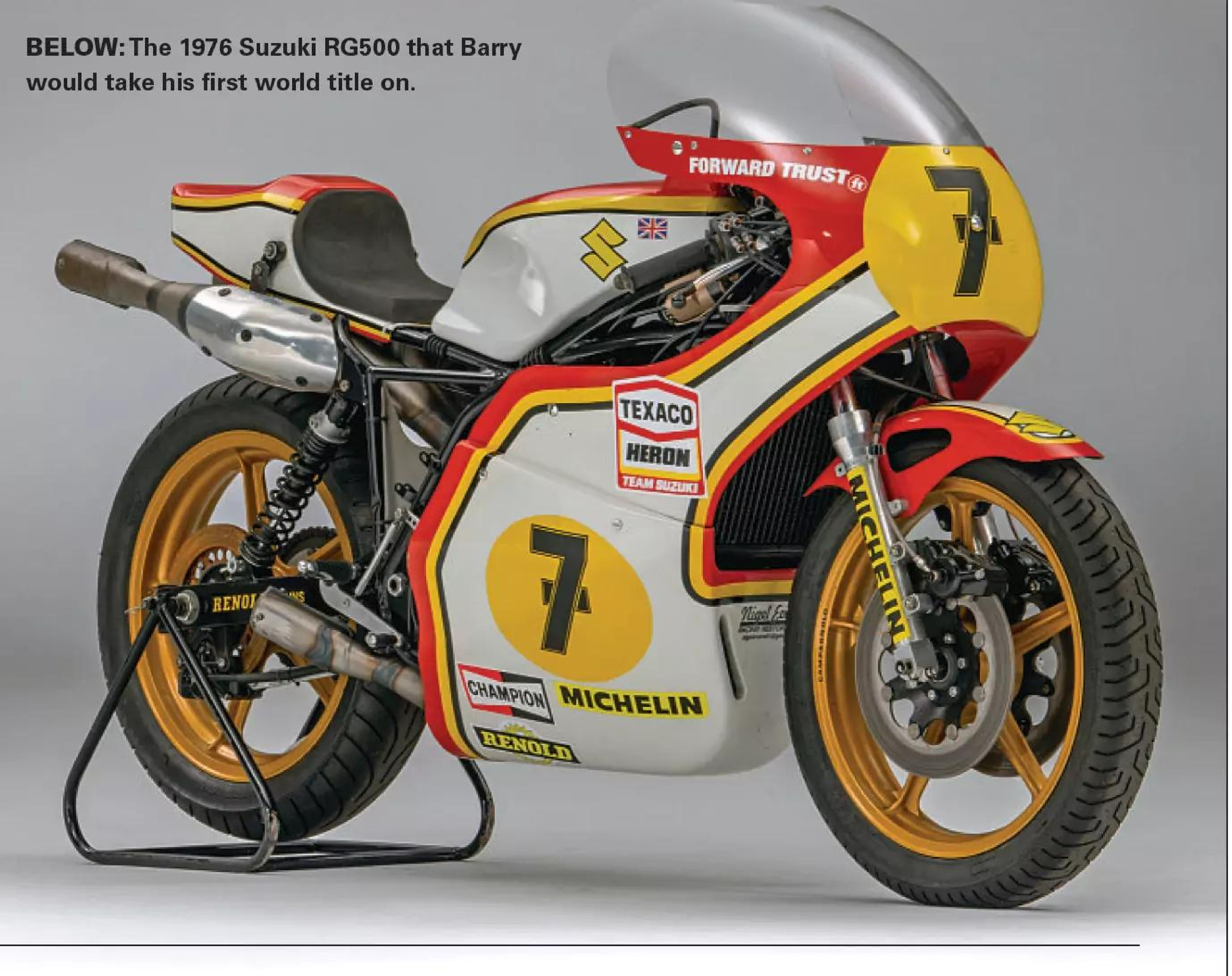




After two world championships, fame was secured: This is Your Life, 1978.

ABOVE: The number and logo of a legend.

BELOW: The 1976 Suzuki RG500 that Barry would take his first world title on.



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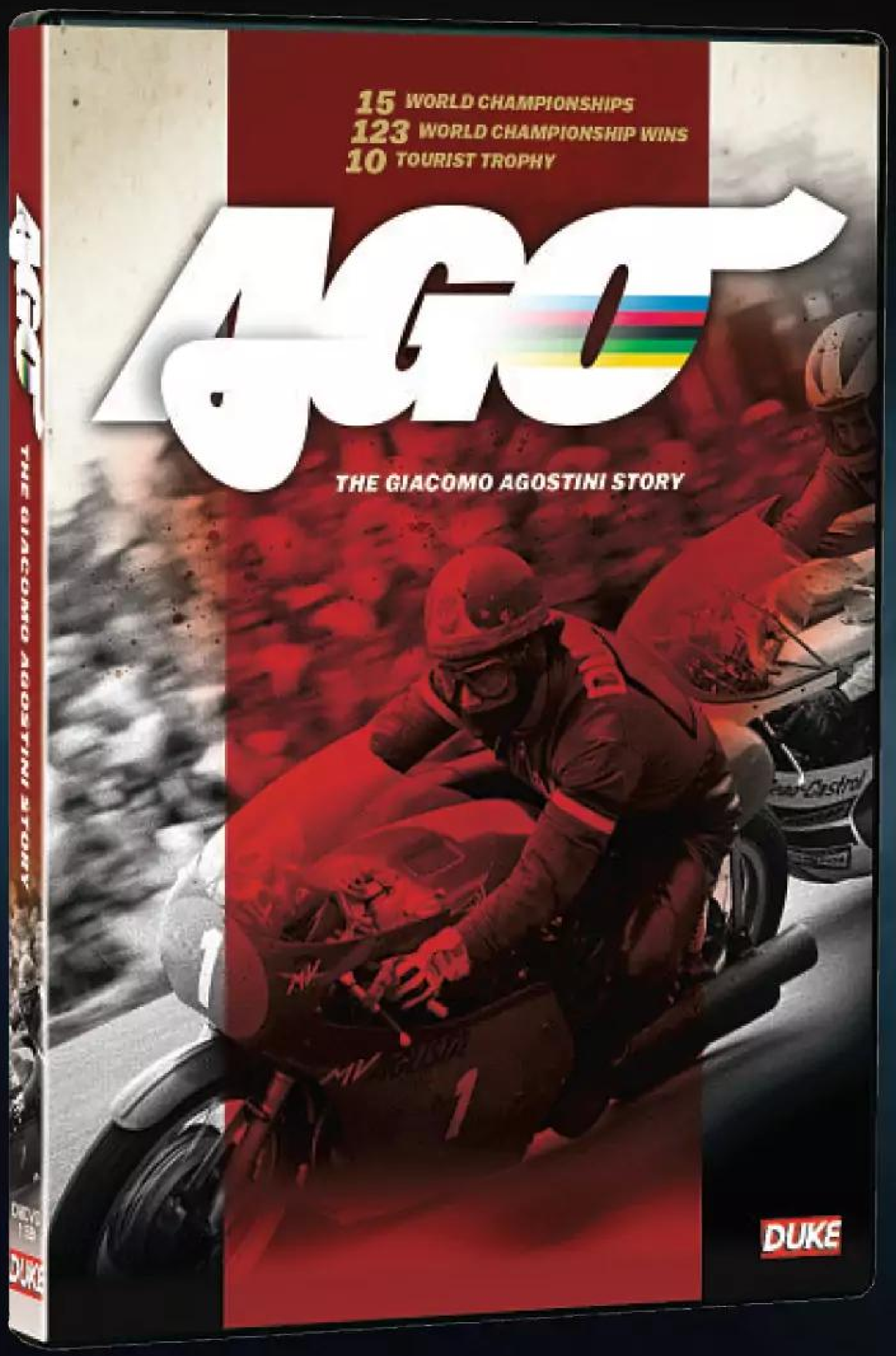
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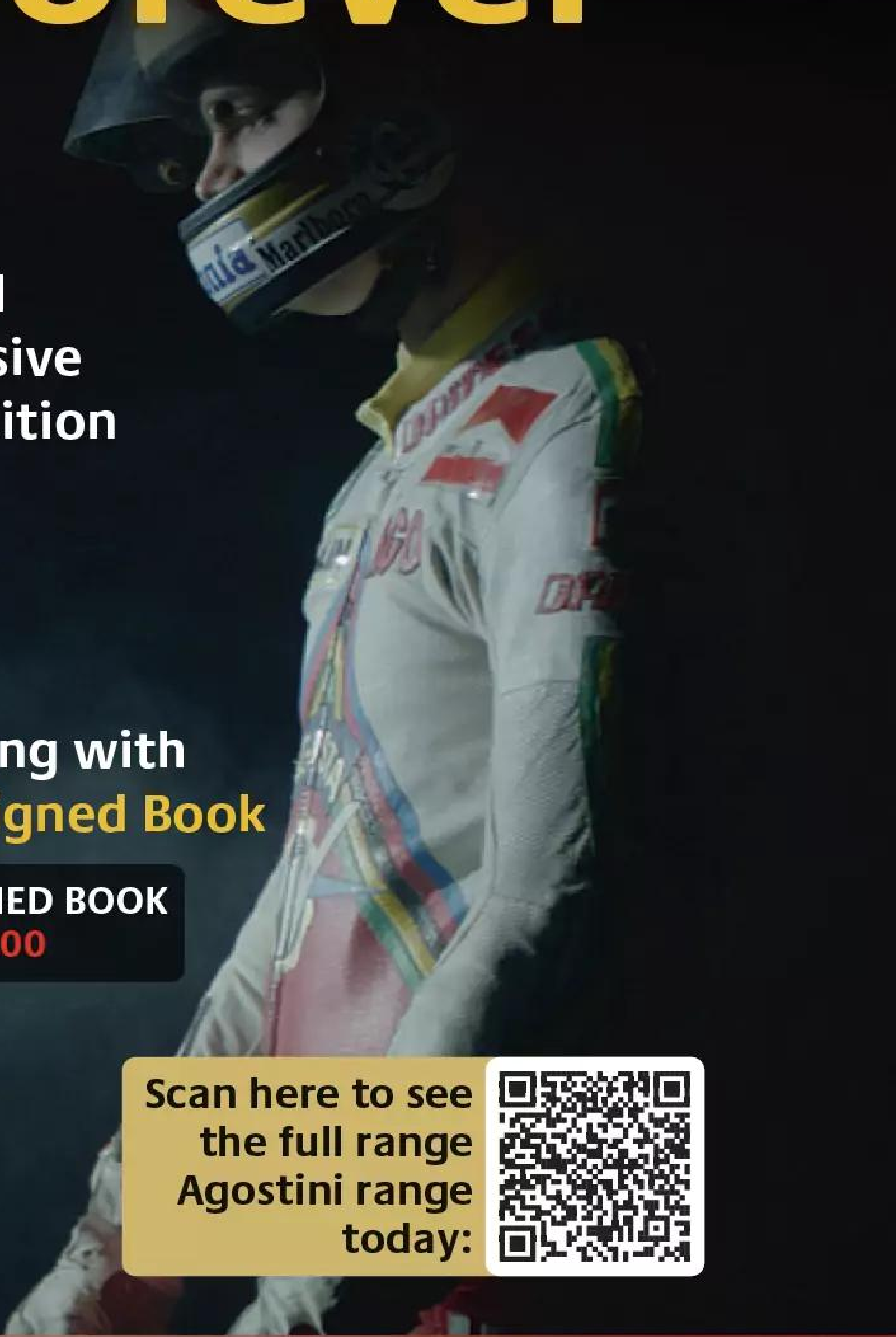

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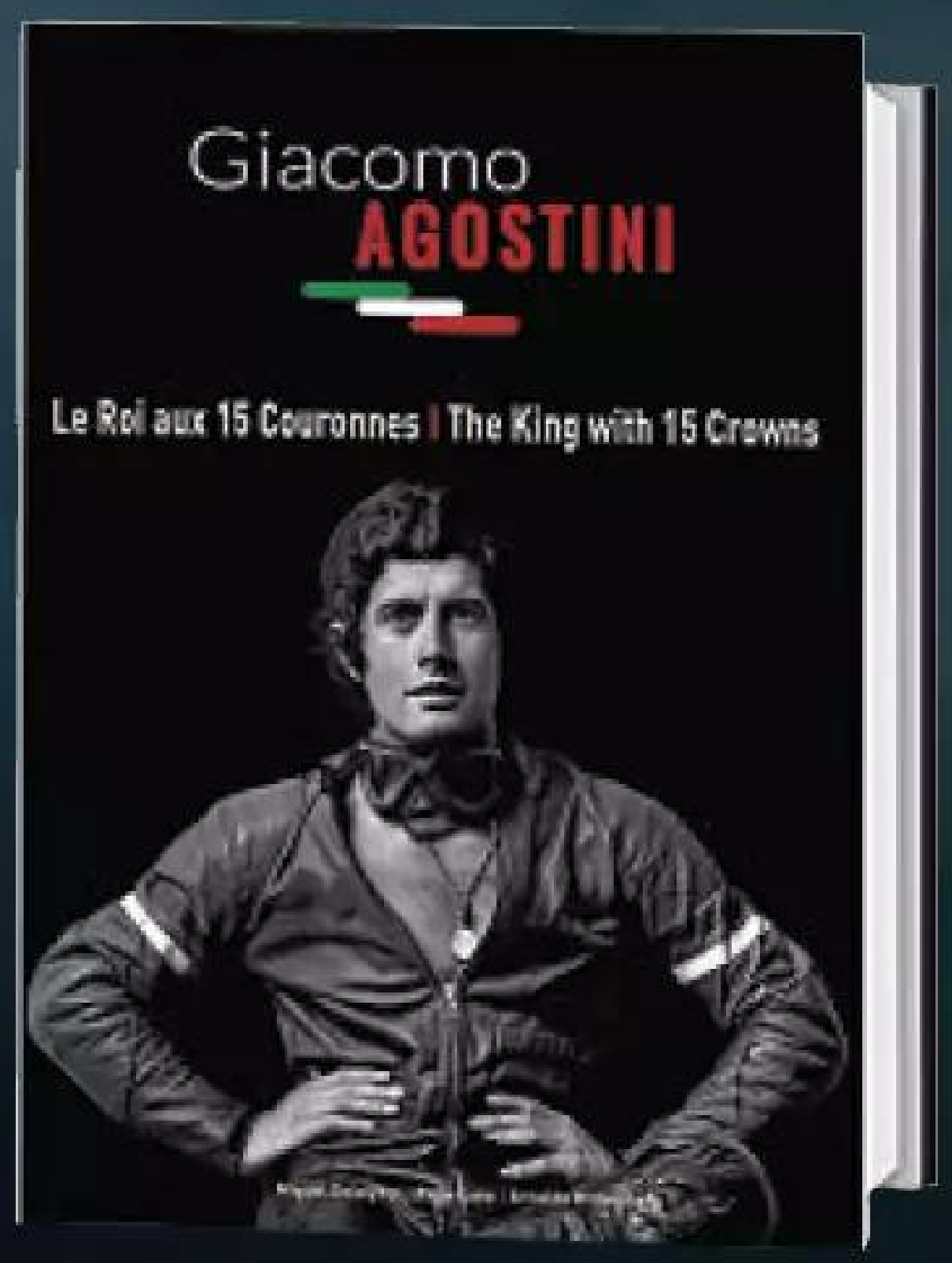
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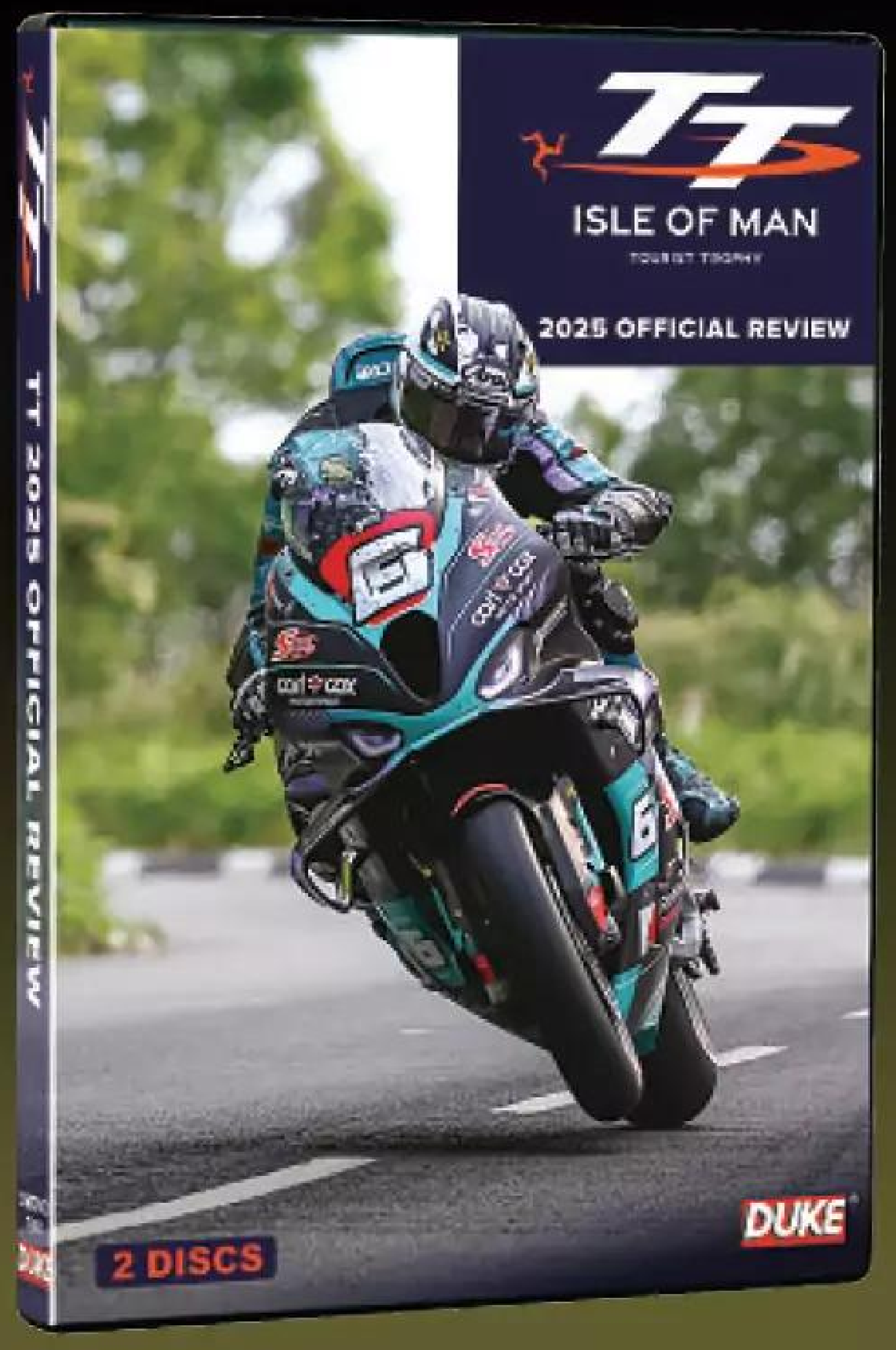
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BOOM AND BUST..

PART TWO

...and back again. In the second part of our three-part series, world champion turned TV presenter Neil Hodgson tells us about his first foray into World Superbikes and why he had to come back to Blighty to rebuild his confidence and his career.

Words: Stuart Barker **Photographs:** Clive Challinor, Mortons Archive

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After winning the 125cc British Championship at his first attempt in 1992, Neil Hodgson was fast-tracked to the 125cc Grand Prix World Championship and then earned a ride in the premier 500cc class.

Despite showing immense promise as a privateer and getting a couple of races on a factory Yamaha, back then the chances for a British rider to be anything other than a 'best of the rest' non-factory rider were next to nothing…

So, with no decent GP offers for the 1996 season, he moved over to the World Superbike Championship to join the factory Ducati team; and his team-mate would be the unfathomable American, John Kocinski. Hodgson soon discovered he may have bitten off more than he could chew.

"The first year I was team-mates with John Kocinski, as Carl Fogarty had left Ducati to go to Honda," he explains. "I look back now on that period and, actually, I did alright, but it was too much too soon. Ideally, I should have gone to WSB in a smaller team. There was too much pressure in the factory team, and I had never ridden a factory superbike before. I was out of my depth. I had never ridden on Michelins either and I had John Kocinski as my team-mate! I was also riding for an Italian team, so no-one spoke English – on my side of the garage anyway. It was a shock to the system. I had gone from a really good team (the WCM team in 500cc Grands Prix) into a team that, on paper, looked amazing – and I'm not saying the team wasn't amazing – but it was hard for me to deal with it all."

While he had ridden 125cc and 500cc Grand Prix bikes, this was Hodgson's first time on a superbike (other than the odd non-factory one-off ride in Britain) and, despite his experience, it wasn't an easy transition to make, despite having the best bike on the grid. He explains: "I have to say the Ducati 916 (by then bored out to 955cc) felt really nice to ride. Smooth power, V-twin engine, and not too aggressive. But I had always been on tyres that offered a lot of feel and the Michelins didn't. They gave lots of grip, but no feel, so, there was a lot of blind faith involved, and I suffered loads of high-sides because of that. I must have eight high-sides during pre-season testing alone. Up to joining Ducati, I'd probably had just two high-sides in my whole career, and now I couldn't stop having them because the tyres were giving me no feeling. I was also still using too much lean angle – still using my old 125 lines; I hadn't managed to develop into a big bike rider yet."

There was also John Kocinski to deal with in the garage. The former 1990 250cc Grand Prix world champion and 500cc GP winner was known back in the day for his eccentricities and supposedly having OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), so his actions could appear utterly bizarre to others. "John was so unique – a very strange individual," Hodgson admits. "I don't mean that horribly, I just mean he was so different from anyone I'd ever

By 1997, Neil was team-mates with Carl Fogarty and trying to get to grips with the Ducati.

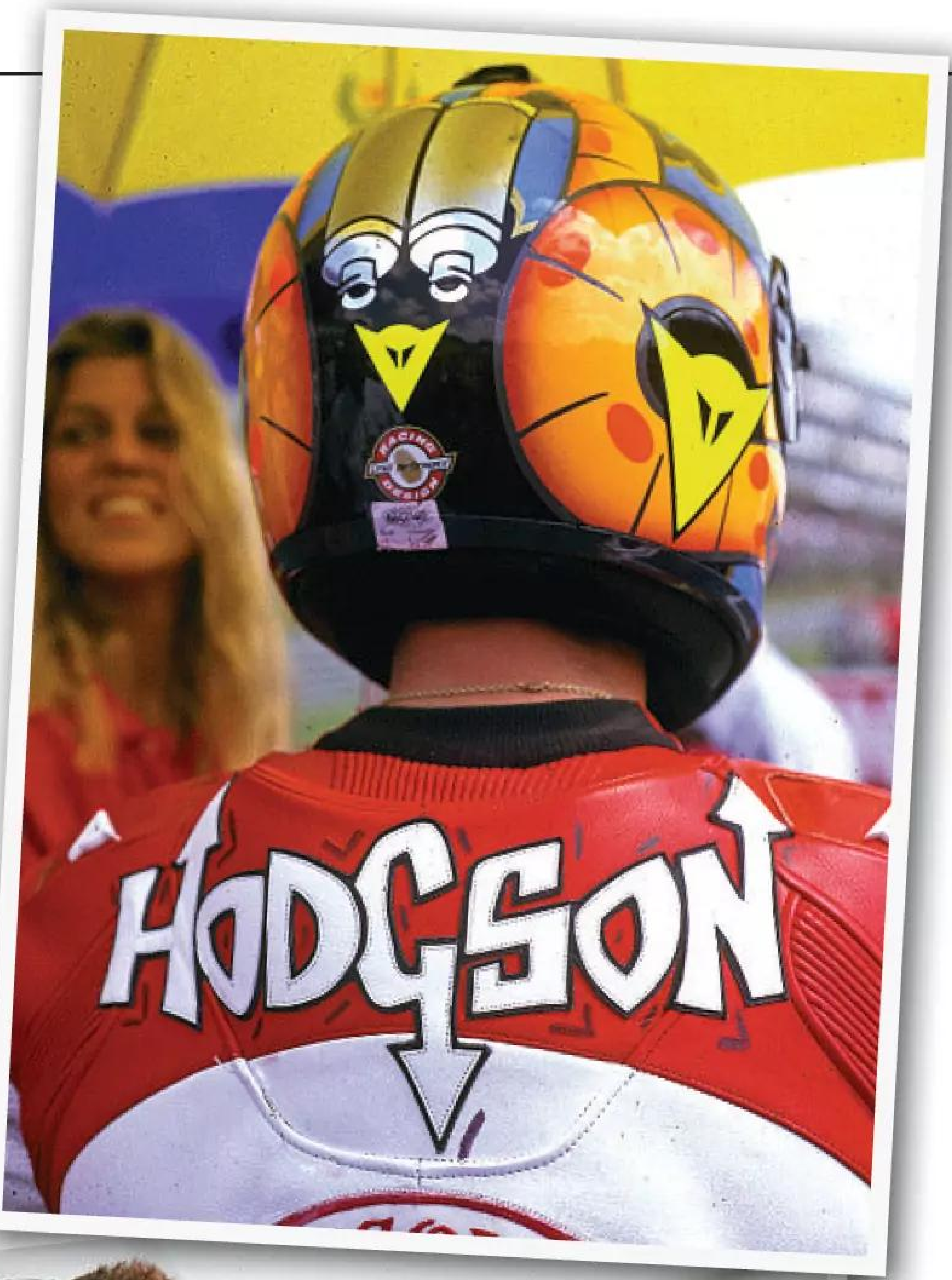
met – even to this day. You'd see him cleaning his crash helmet for more than two hours after every test session which was strange to someone like me. He didn't help me at all – and nor should he; it wasn't his job to help me, but we really didn't get on. He was very demanding in the garage. The team was built around him because he was the big superstar and I was just a young British rider getting an opportunity. We didn't hate each other; we just didn't really get on. John was doing his thing, and I was doing mine."

Hodgson finished his debut WSB season in tenth place overall, with a best result of 3rd at Laguna Seca in America (Kocinski finished third overall and won the title the following year with Honda). It was, Neil felt, a decent effort: "I was happy with that," he says on reflection. "When I look back, I think I did alright. I had a couple of injuries, and I was inconsistent – of course I was going to be inconsistent – but there were lots of races when I was in the mix, inside the top six, battling away. Out of my depth, maybe, but still in the mix, so it wasn't a disaster of a year. But I felt like I needed another year with the team, and I was lucky enough to get a second year."

For the 1997 season, Carl Fogarty and John Kocinski swapped places, with the American joining Honda and Foggy returning to the Ducati fold. But the season didn't pan out as Hodgson had hoped, although he did get on with Fogarty who was, by then WSB's biggest star. He admits: "My second year with Ducati didn't work out. I had four injuries and never really managed to build any sort of momentum. I got on well with Foggy though; he was my hero. Imagine you're from Burnley, like me, and Carl Fogarty is from Blackburn, just 10 miles away; he was every bit the local hero, so I was chuffed to bits when I first met him, and we've always got on well. He helped me a little bit in the early days. There were times when he was brilliant and times not so much, but he had a lot of pressure on him at that time."

Foggy hadn't become the biggest thing in World Superbikes without reason, and Hodgson saw up close what made him so special as a rider. "What I couldn't get my head around was that I was every bit as fast as Carl in terms of out-and-out speed," he says. "I've never been one for bragging but, genuinely, I was as fast as Carl at any track we went to, over a single lap. But over race distance Carl was amazing, He was so good on worn tyres, and he could ride a bike that wasn't set-up properly. I outqualified him lots of times, and I'd often be faster than him in

Hodgson swapped to the 750cc inline four-cylinder for 1998.



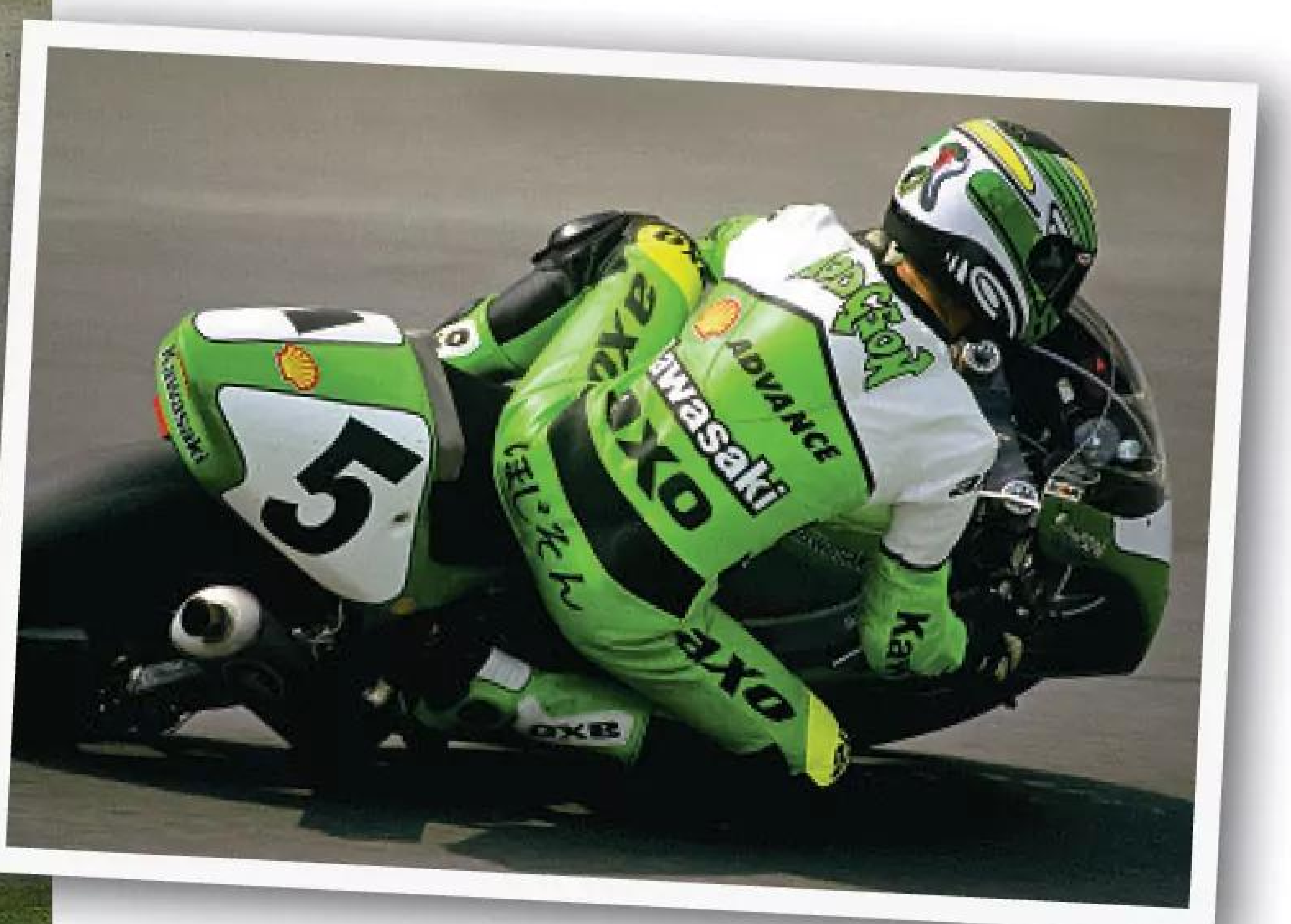
TOP: 1996 saw a best WSB result of 3rd place in Laguna Seca.

ABOVE: Neil and Carl in later years: Neil was amazed how Foggy rode around bike problems.

testing, but Carl had the ability to ride a bike that wasn't working properly. He could make the difference – it was like he didn't care. All the greats have been able to do that, but I was too sensitive. When it was on, it was on, but if the bike was off a little bit, I couldn't make the difference. But I learned a lot over those years by watching people like Carl. Troy Bayliss was the same when we were team-mates in British Superbikes in 1999. Again, I was every bit as fast as Troy over a lap, but he could make the difference on the bad days – he could win when the bike wasn't right, and I couldn't. I needed all the stars to be aligned for me to win."

During his two years at Ducati, Hodgson had another eccentric rider to deal with in the shape of Anthony Gobert: not as a team-mate, but as a rival. The hugely talented Australian suffered serious alcohol and drug addictions during his life and passed away in 2024 at the age of just 48. "The sad thing about Anthony Gobert was that, even back then, you could almost have predicted what eventually happened," Hodgson says. "He was out of control. I almost felt sorry for him because he was super-shy and massively introverted and just couldn't talk to people when he was sober. He obviously had a massive drinking problem and when he was drinking, all of a sudden, out came Go-ey – almost as if he had an alter ego."

At Brno in the Czech Republic in 1996, Hodgson had a handbags-at-dawn moment with Gobert and fellow Australian rider, Kirk McCarthy. Neil recalls: "Gobert crashed out of the second race at Brno on the first lap and he thought I was something to do with it, which I wasn't. Well, I was caught up in it, but I never caused him to crash. Anyway, I finished 4th and was feeling quite good about myself. I got back to my motorhome and hung my leathers and helmet outside to dry. Gobert and Kirk McCarthy got leathered after the race and Kirk pissed in my crash helmet. Everyone thinks it was Gobert who did that, but it was Kirk McCarthy (McCarthy was killed in an Australian Superbike race in 2004). He then kicked the helmet, so it skidded past my motorhome door. I came out at that point, and me and Gobert ended up having one of those pathetic pushing fights, but it all blew over pretty quickly."



Good results were very hard to come by on the long-in-the-tooth Kawasaki ZX-7R.

Sadly, the stars didn't align for Hodgson very often in 1997 and he finished the season in ninth place overall, with a best finish of 4th at Misano. His Ducati contract was not renewed, and for the 1998 season Hodgson opted to sign for Kawasaki which was another big change: it was his first time on a factory four-cylinder superbike, so there was more learning to do. "It took me a while to get used to riding a four-cylinder motorbike," he admits. "I jumped on the Kawasaki and thought: 'Shit, this is hard to ride!' The good thing was that we were running Dunlop tyres so I could feel the bike again and could feel where the limit was, so I wasn't crashing as much. But the ZX-7R wasn't really that competitive."

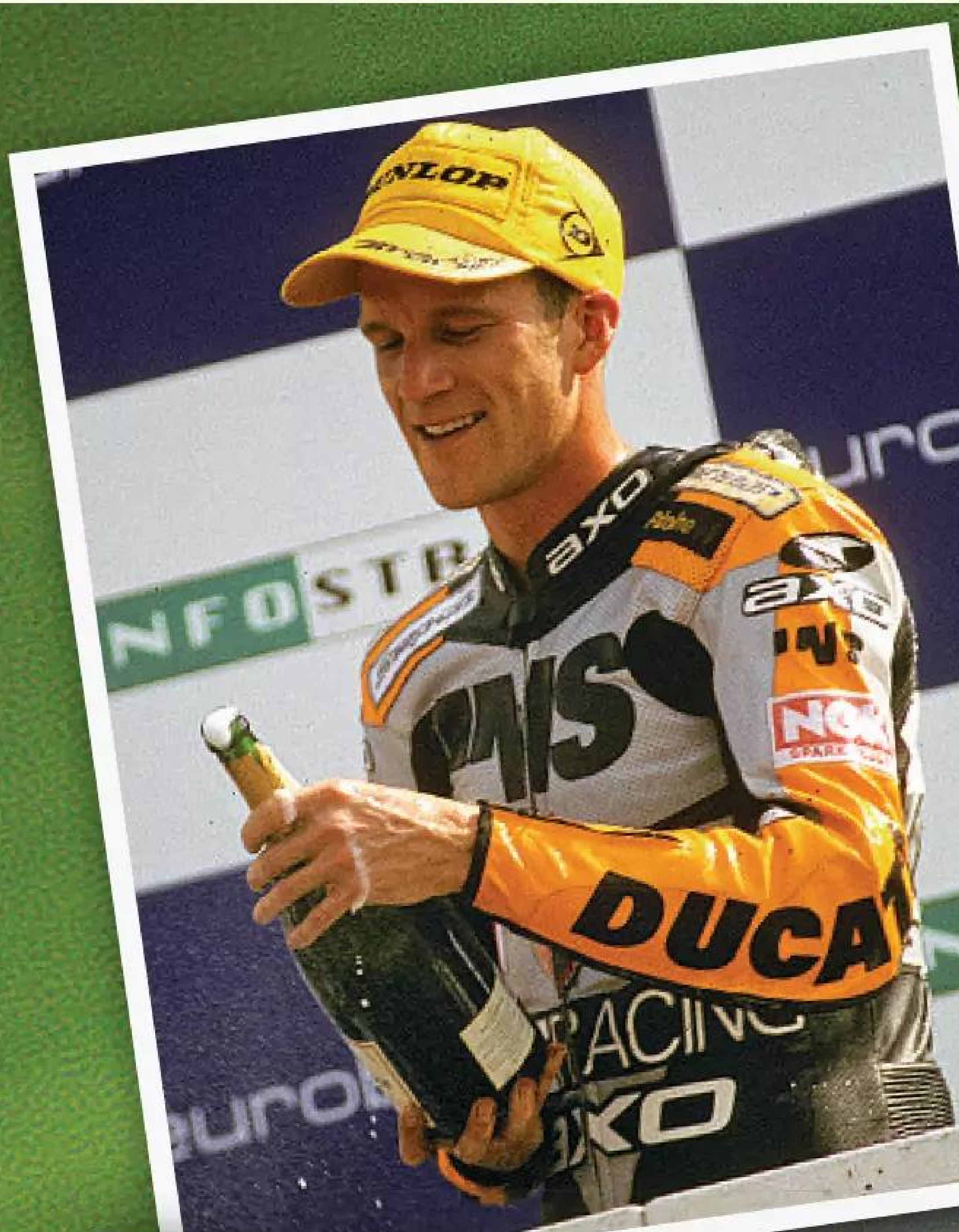
It would prove to be another tough year for Hodgson. He would finish the season in 11th place overall and would lose his confidence and self-belief along the way and, once lost, they're hard things to recover. "That year I started doubting myself for the first time in my career – I started to lose my confidence," he confesses. "That's the reality of what happened in 1998. I was never slow – I was a good seventh-place man and had the odd decent result – but I had just lost confidence and it was a weird thing to experience. Even in my 125cc GP days, I never thought the others were doing anything that special – I always felt I'd be able to figure it out and run with them, but by 1998 I had started to think I maybe wasn't good enough. It can happen to any rider, and I wasn't enjoying my racing anymore – it felt like a job, and I doubted myself."

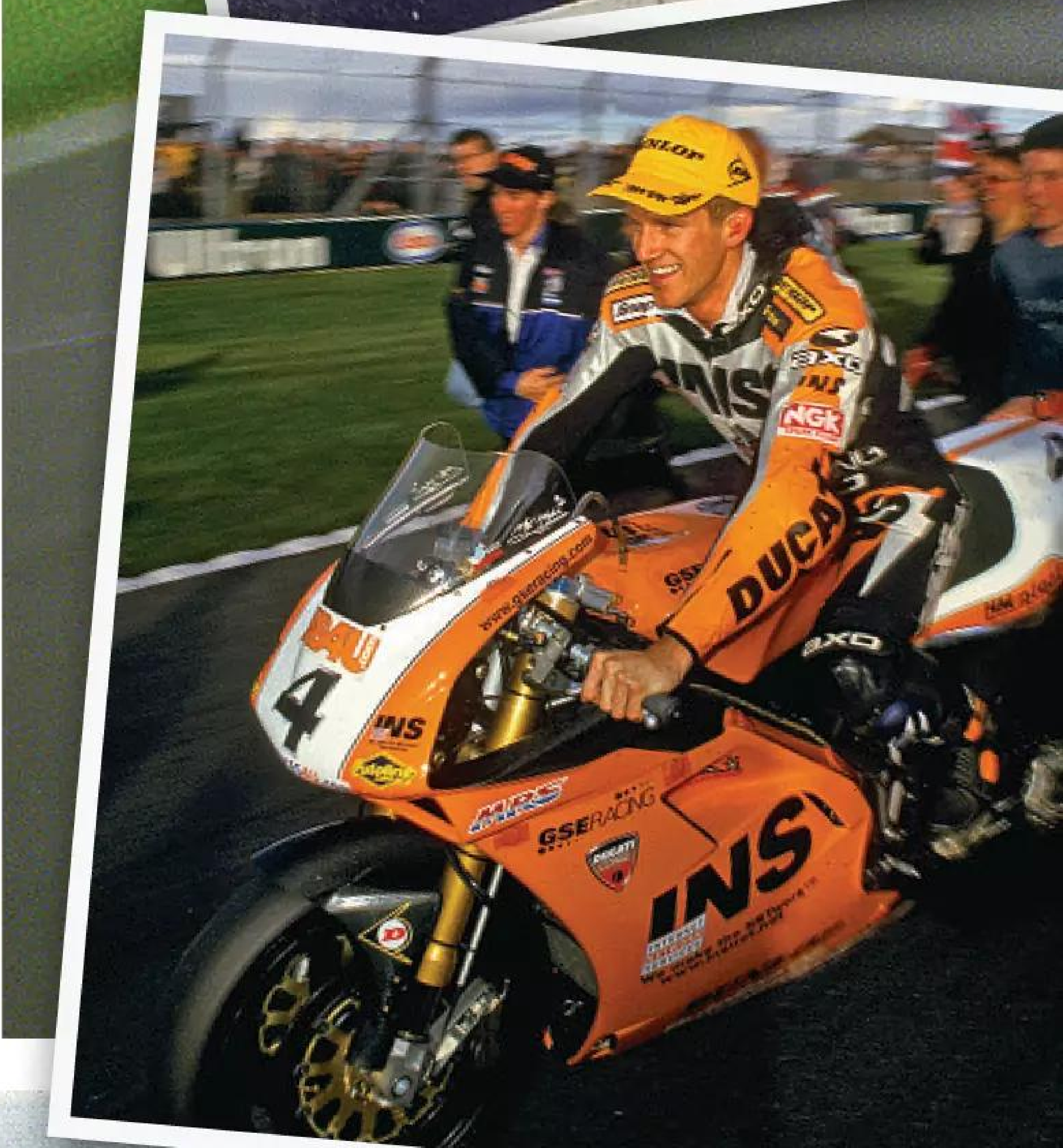
The 1998 season saw another classic handbags-at-dawn encounter, this time with Aaron Slight, at the title-deciding final round at Sugo in Japan. Slight, Carl Fogarty and Troy Corser were all in contention for the title, and Slight tried everything he could to gain an advantage ahead of the race.

Hodgson says: "I qualified quite well, and Aaron Slight was behind me. I never got on with Slight – he was always rude to me. That's racing – it can be like that, no big deal. Anyway, he came up to me on the grid and said: 'If I show you my front wheel, will you let me through?' I genuinely thought he was taking the piss. When I realised he was serious, I thought: 'Yeah, right – as if!' That annoyed me, and I thought: 'The disrespectful little bastard! How dare he?' During the race he kept trying to pass me, but I obviously wasn't going to let him through. Eventually, he passed me, but then ran wide, so I passed him back and beat him. As we went over the line, he came alongside me and gave me a massive boot, which no-one had ever done to me, before or since. He kicked me. That got me really annoyed, so we pulled up alongside each other and (embarrassingly) threw our bikes down, got our handbags out, and started slapping each other! It was one of those moments in life when you look back and think: 'I'm sure I could have dealt with that situation a bit better!'"

The Sugo meeting would prove to be Hodgson's last with Kawasaki, and his last in WSB, for the time being, at least. With his confidence shot, he needed to rebuild. He needed to find his self-belief again. He needed to enjoy his racing. It was time to go home.

"It was exactly that; it was a deliberate plan," Hodgson says. "I'd stopped enjoying racing and there were no opportunities in world championship racing. I was 25 years old, so it was a bit of a make-or-break year. I





2000 didn't just see the BSB title, but two 'wild-card' WSB wins.

LEFT TOP: Back in Britain, and back to winning ways.

LEFT: Taking the BSB title in 2000, Neil showed the resilience and skills needed to go to the very top in road-racing.

The 2000 BSB season was one of the very best. The fight was between Hodgson (4) and Chris Walker (2).

Taking WSB wins at Donington and Brands showed that Neil was a world-class winner.

thought I'd come back to England, give it a go, try to rediscover my love for racing, and try to battle at the front in some races and get back that winning feeling. And that's exactly what happened."

The first race of the 1999 British Superbike Championship was held on the Brands Hatch Indy circuit, and Hodgson won first time out, leading home Chris Walker, John Reynolds and an Australian rider called Troy Bayliss. "Winning first time out was a brilliant boost to my confidence, because I hadn't won a race for ages," he says. "When you come back from a world championship, there's a lot of pressure on you. A lot of people were saying: 'Oh, he won't be able to cope with British Superbike racing.' I respected the BSB riders, but I wasn't afraid of anyone. That year was the first time I met Chris Walker on track and every time he passed me there was always contact. I kept thinking: 'The dirty bastard! Bloody hell – he's not shy!' So, I had his card marked from the first few races that year. Chris was always super aggressive, and he would always have a go."

Although he had a good, consistent season, Hodgson didn't win again until the very last race at Donington Park. But there were good reasons for that, as he explains. "I had to relearn the British tracks, because I'd only done a couple of seasons on a 125, and those tracks are very different animals when you're riding a superbike. I remember turning up at Thruxton and just feeling absolutely lost, and Cadwell Park seemed an awful lot narrower on a superbike too. So, it took me a full year to really get into it, and I suffered really bad arm pump, which I'd never had before. My right arm kept locking up in the races. There were a few times when I should have won races but didn't, because of arm pump. As soon as the season finished, I had an operation to sort that out."

Hodgson gives a lot of credit to his team for helping him rebuild his confidence in 1999. "I was lucky in joining the right team," he says. "GSE Racing was a relatively new team, only in about their second year. I got on great with Troy Bayliss too. We became really close that year and we worked well together. Troy won the championship, and I finished fourth, but I learnt loads. That was the year I genuinely learned how to ride a big bike; from then on, I was all right. It had taken me four years to really understand how to ride a big bike."

Staying with the GSE Racing Team, everything was set for Hodgson to have a proper crack at the title in 2000. "That year was just so much joy because, as a rider, you know when you're ready," he says. "Everything had built up for me: I'd had all the ups and downs, I'd raced in world championships, and by 2000, I knew how to ride a big bike, I was in the right team, and I knew it was a make-or-break year, but I didn't feel nervous at all. I was ready. I genuinely felt that the rest of them were all going to get it."

As things turned out, it would prove to be one of the most spectacular seasons ever witnessed in BSB, as Hodgson went head-to-head with Chris Walker on the Crescent Suzuki GSX-R750. The pair knocked each other off regularly and there was even a court case to settle a points dispute. The two riders ended up hating each other, but it was a hatred that drove both to new heights.

"Me and Chris just didn't get on," Hodgson admits. "We rode completely different lines, and he was very aggressive, while I was a lot smoother. But it was like the perfect storm – we clashed on every apex! I'd be swooping in, he'd be dive-bombing. I had a faster bike, he had a nimbler bike. Honestly, it just couldn't have been any better. And the best thing is that we're good pals now and can look back and laugh about that season."

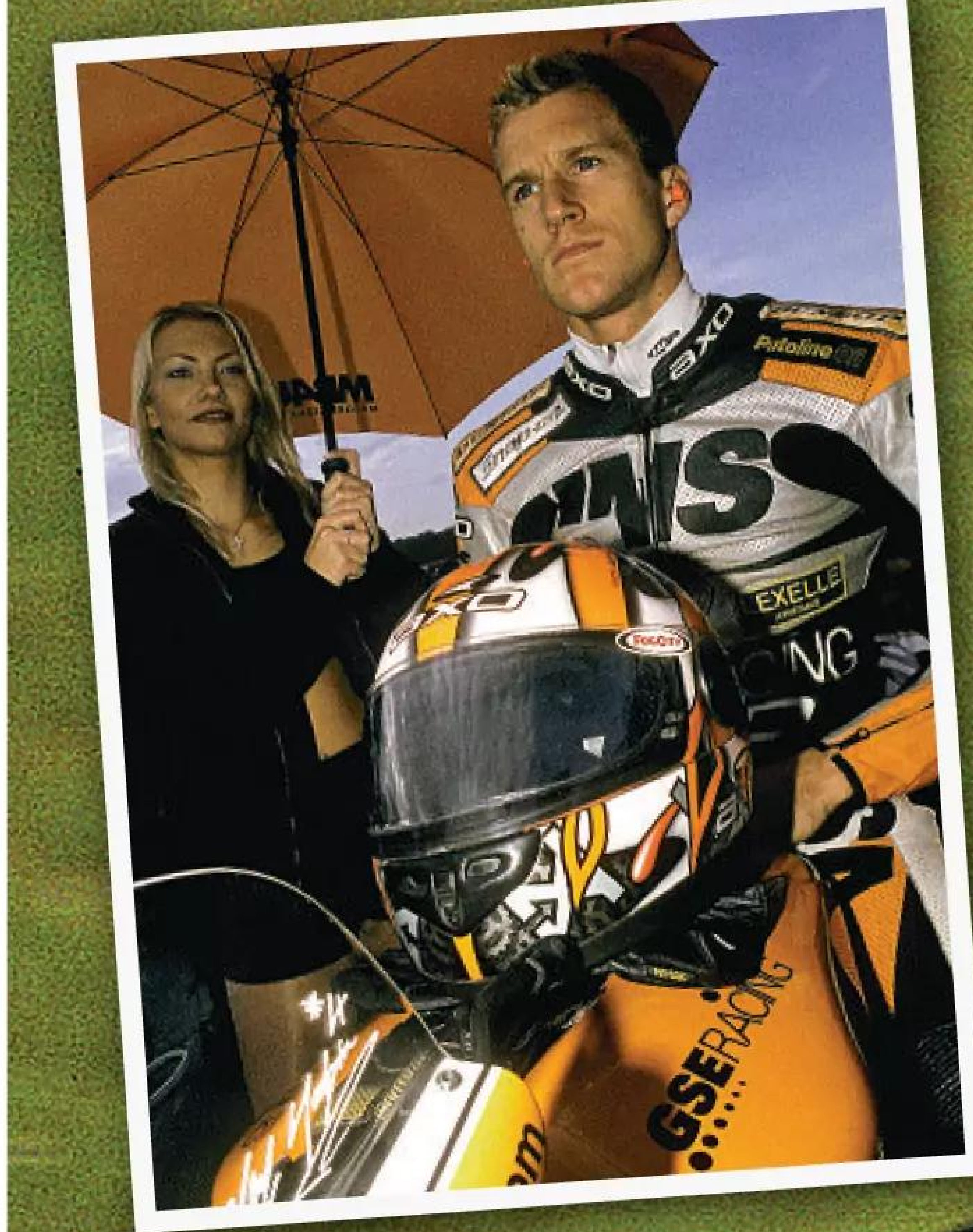
Hodgson was by now so comfortable on a superbike that he pulled off one of the greatest rides ever seen in BSB by winning from last place on the grid at Oulton Park. To this day he can't explain what happened that day. "I don't even know how I did that," he admits. "I had stalled my bike before the warm-up lap, so that demoted me from the front row of the grid to the back row. I was always really nervous before the start of a race – always super-anxious – but that day I sat on the back of the grid, and I was so calm it was unreal. I remember thinking: 'Oh my god, this is going to be amazing – I'm going to destroy them all.' I just knew it."

And destroy them all he did. "The first lap was well sketchy," Hodgson recalls. "I wish I'd had an on-board camera that day. I don't know how I didn't crash, because I rode well over my limit and pulled some really stupid moves. Luckily, I got away with it. But then, after that first lap, I was Valentino Rossi for a day! That's the only way I can describe it. What a lovely feeling it was. I could do no wrong."

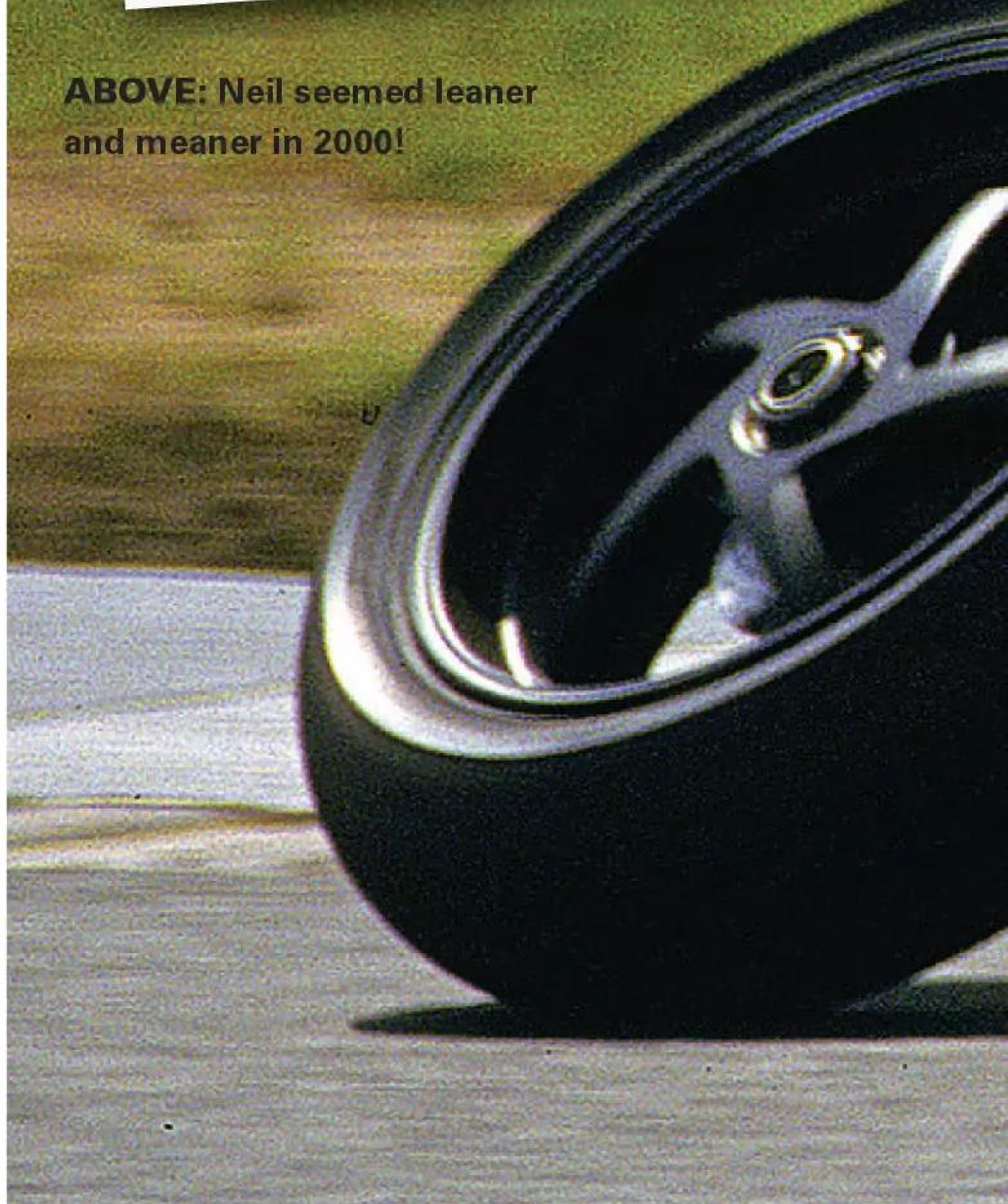
Hodgson took the title at the final round when Chris Walker's GSX-R750 suffered a rare engine blow up. It was a sad end for Walker, but his riding in 2000 had impressed even the Grand Prix paddock and he would be rewarded with a 500cc ride on the Shell Honda in 2001.

Hodgson's riding had also impressed, and he too was rewarded with a ride on the world stage. He was going back to World Superbikes, where he had unfinished business. And with his confidence now at an all-time high, there would be no stopping him this time. *CR*

■ In the next issue, Hodgy tells us of his return to World Superbikes and his determined bid to finally secure a world championship.



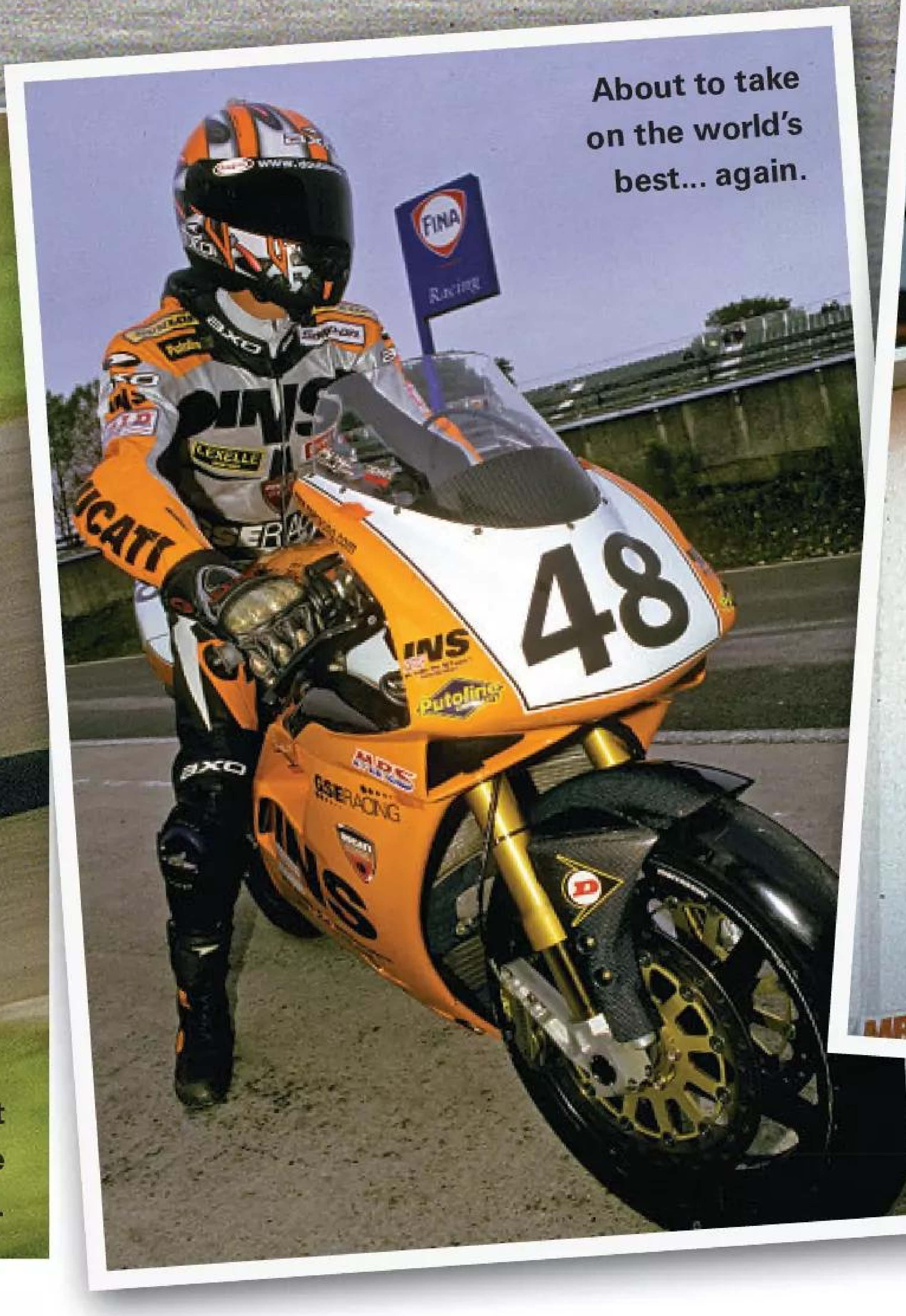
ABOVE: Neil seemed leaner and meaner in 2000!



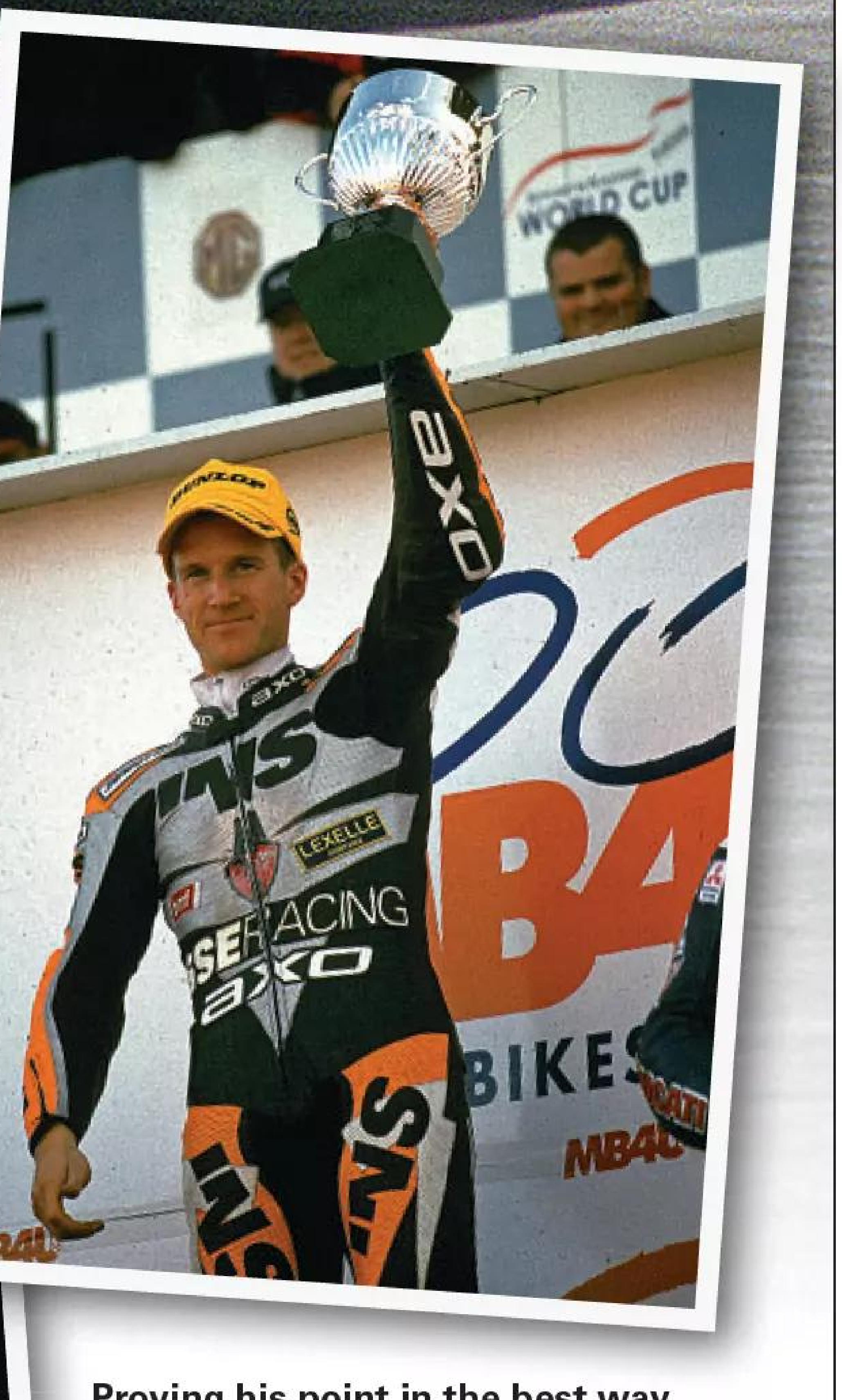
Neil on his way to his second WSB wild-card win of 2000 at Brands.

Hodgson really came of age in 2000 thanks to the support from his GSE team.

Winning a WSB race at Donington really got the monkey off Neil's back.



About to take on the world's best... again.



Proving his point in the best way possible: about to lift the 2000 British Superbikes trophy.

DOING DONINGTON!

Classic Racer friends Tony and Claire Greenslade run Gibson/Allspeed exhausts in Essex – they also run a successful team in the CRMC championship. This issue Tony and the team head to Donington Park.

Words: Tony Greenslade **Photographs:** Pete Morris, Tony Greenslade

The same picture of Tony Greenslade AGAIN! A tenner for anyone who supplies a new one...

The Classic Festival at Donington Park is the biggest meeting of the year for CRMC, and we wanted to do well.

Having given the YZF750 a rest this season it seemed the perfect event to get it back out. #42 Adam Carson was going to be very busy, having entered the PC750 Clubman on our TZR250, the SuperSport 600 on the FZR600R and the Superbike 750 plus the big race of the weekend the Wheatcroft Trophy on the YZF750. In total, 13 races over two days.

Did I mention we also had taken along our Yamaha OW01 for the GP Parade? If Adam has some spare time, he would take this out as well.

We got into our garage for the weekend Friday evening and got everything set-up for an early start in the morning. We got new tyres fitted to the FZR600R care of a very generous Graham Marchant. An ex-racer of some calibre. We have known Graham for a few years, and he always keeps up to date with the team's progress. Thank you very much Graham, very kind and unexpected.

Saturday morning was an early start; we had four bikes to get checked by the scrutineers before 9am. Joining us for the weekend on the spanners was James, he was up and ready before us. We really needed James's help this weekend, trying to run three bikes over the weekend is quite a task. Making sure they are safe to race, fuelled up, tyre pressures checked, and engines warmed up is a full-time job on its own.

First out on track was the YZF750, Adam has not ridden this since August last year. We had planned to fit a new engine we had built over the winter and make several changes to the bike. However, the FZR600R build took over our lives and the YZF was left unchanged. We know what we must do this winter! Adam wasted no time getting used to the 750 again, he qualified ninth in the class. That may not sound as good as you think, however this weekend the big names were all out. All the CRMC top riders were on the grid, as well as some world class riders. We were joined by Casey O'Gorman on a RC30 and Ian Hutchinson on a ZXR750. Finishing ninth in this quality field of bikes we were very happy.

Adam followed this up with two 9th place finishes in the Superbike races Saturday and matching his lap times from last year: very pleased with that.

Next out was the FZR600R. Since the last meeting at Lydden Hill we have stripped the front brake calipers and rebuilt them. Fitted new brake discs and pads to the front brakes as well, as the braking was really letting the bike down. We also fitted a quick-action throttle and a new fuel pump as the old one broke down. Adam took sixth in the qualifying and said the bike was the best it has ever been. He was very happy with it, and this showed, beating his qualifying time he had just set on the YZF750 by nearly a second! In the two races Saturday Adam finished 7th place in each, more importantly he was dropping his lap time each time he rode the 600.

Last of the bikes, the little TZR250. Not sharing the grid this weekend with the TZ two-strokes, he was up against some much bigger

One thing you can't say is that the Team Allspeed Yams don't add a touch of colour to CRMC...

He's not that big a lad, but Adam does somewhat dwarf the little TZR250!

The YZF always gets the attention...

four-strokes. We had no expectations at all, in fact Adam expected to be mid-pack at best with only 53bhp. How wrong could we be? He put it on the front row, finishing third in the qualifying session. Adam went on to finish 4th in both races Saturday after leading for the first couple of laps, before the bigger bikes took over. He just couldn't hold them off down the straights. A great first day for Adam and had everything crossed for another good day Sunday.

Sunday morning and there had been some rain overnight, but the sky was brightening up.

Same order as yesterday, except Adam also had the Wheatcroft Trophy race in the middle of the day. This is a much longer race and one he was riding the 750 in. He had qualified 12th for the race.

First race of the day and it was the Superbike 750 class again. Getting used to the YZF750, Adam had a better first race finishing 6th overall. The last race of the weekend for this class and the field was a little depleted due to some retirements, with Adam having a great ride to 3rd. A great podium result in this highly competitive class.

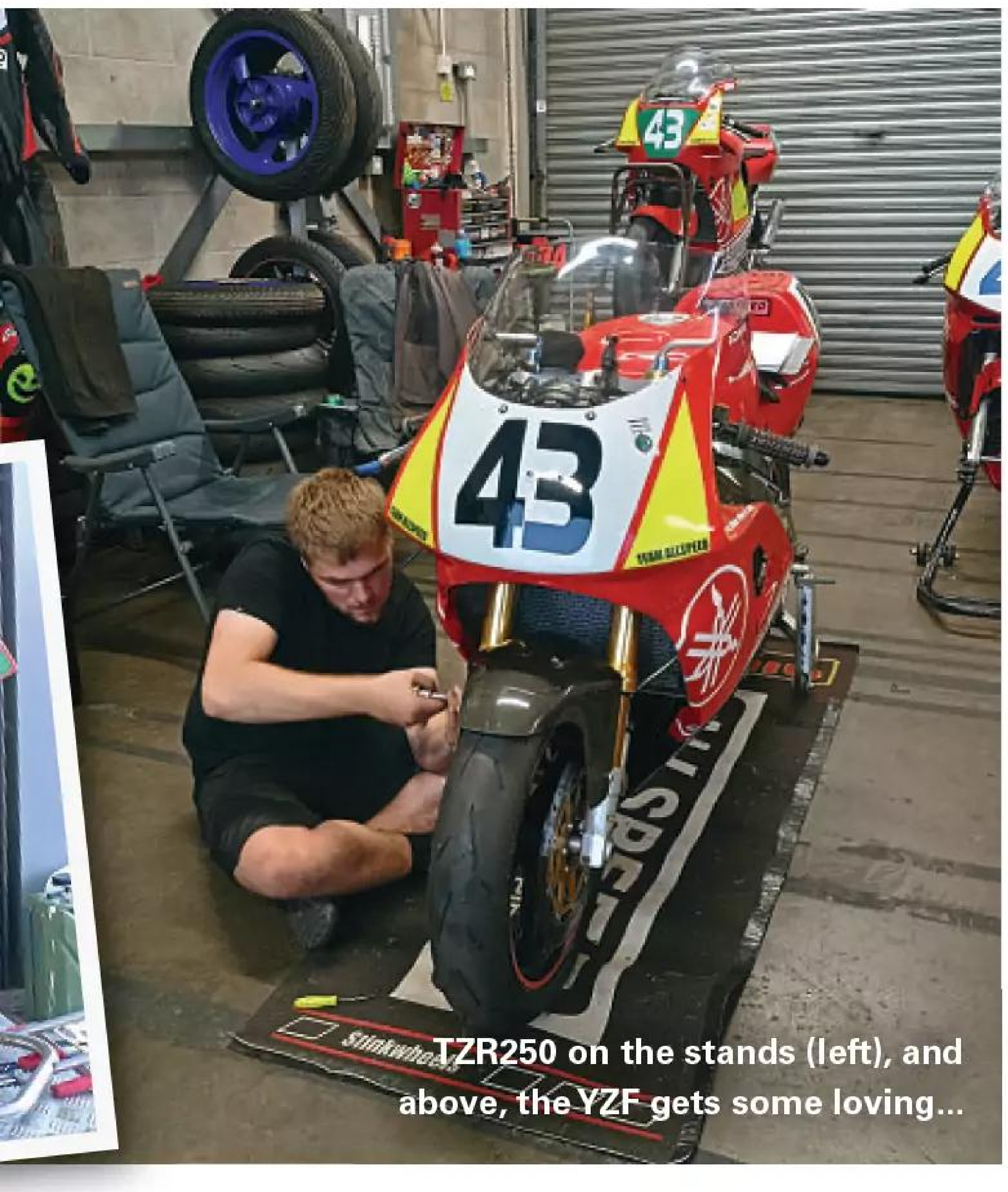
Straight off the 750 and onto the 600, Adam was flying. He said the FZR was now feeling better to ride than the YZF. Something we had always said from the start of the 600 project was if we could get it to handle as good as the YZF we would be happy. For Adam to say it was better felt a real achievement. All those Saturdays in the cold workshop over the winter had been worth it. We had built a SuperSport 600 bike that no one else was willing to try and made it work.

In his first race on it Sunday, Adam finished 5th. However the last race Sunday on it was a real SuperSport race, he was swapping places all race with three other riders for 3rd place. Adam finally crossed the finish line in 6th place. Adam's lap times were in the 1min 15 seconds: the same as the race winner. This was also quicker than he managed on the YZF750, so the 600 really was better than the 750 now.

TZR250 next, and Adam rode an impressive first race in mixed conditions. The rain we had hoped would stay away made a brief appearance, leaving a wet track. Should we change tyres or not? We gambled and stayed on the dry tyres. With the track drying and Adam's bike control he managed to put the TZR into 2nd place. A fantastic result. He

The Team Allspeed machines in pit-lane. From left: YZF, FZR and TZR.

You really must visit a CRMC race: some nice bikes out there!


TZR250 on the stands (left), and above, the YZF gets some loving...

followed that up with a 3rd place finish in the last race of the day.

Back to the feature race of the weekend. The rain also affected this race. A shower before meant it was looking like wet tyres were going to have to be used. With a damp track Adam decided he felt the most comfortable on the FZR600 this weekend, so opted to use this bike instead of the YZF750. He lined up on dry tyres, as most of the field looked to have done the same. Keeping our options open we also had the CBR600 sitting in the pit lane with the wets on. If it was too wet on the sighting lap the plan was to come in, swap bikes and do a pit lane start.

However, Adam was happy with the dry tyres, and the race started. Unfortunately, a crash on the second lap bought the red flags out. With a short delay to clear the track, the track was nearly dry everywhere and tyres were no longer a worry. A race restart and Adam got off to a good start mixing it with the 750s, eventually finishing in 7th place. A great result for Adam and the 600.

That was our race weekend done, how Adam managed it we don't know. The rest of the team was knackered keeping track of when and what he was out on.

Over the two days Adam rode 119 laps at race pace, 13 warm up laps and four outlaps. Totalling 269 miles. Not to mention the four laps he managed to squeeze in on the OW01 and yes, he loved it!

A massive thanks to James for keeping the bikes ready to go, without him we would have been in a right mess. James even spent Saturday evening cleaning and checking the bikes over whilst we were in the restaurant. That is serious dedication. We must also thank Graham Marchant for the tyres on the FZR600, and Willy for stepping in and buying a set of tyres for the TZR250 when we realised the ones fitted were not going to last another race. Without friends like this we would not have achieved the results we did.

It was a great weekend and the highlight of the CRMC calendar and ours. Roll on Donington 2026. Three bikes again? Well maybe! Unless we can do four? Next issue it's end of the season time, with our exploits at Darley Moor and 'home turf' at Brands Hatch Indy circuit. **CR**

■ We are now looking for sponsors for 2026. So, if you like what we're doing, why not support us with some form of sponsorship, which will get coverage in *Classic Racer* and on our Facebook page. If you're interested, head to our page or contact Bertie at *CR*. We are at: **www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064009153227**

Adam peels into Coppice.

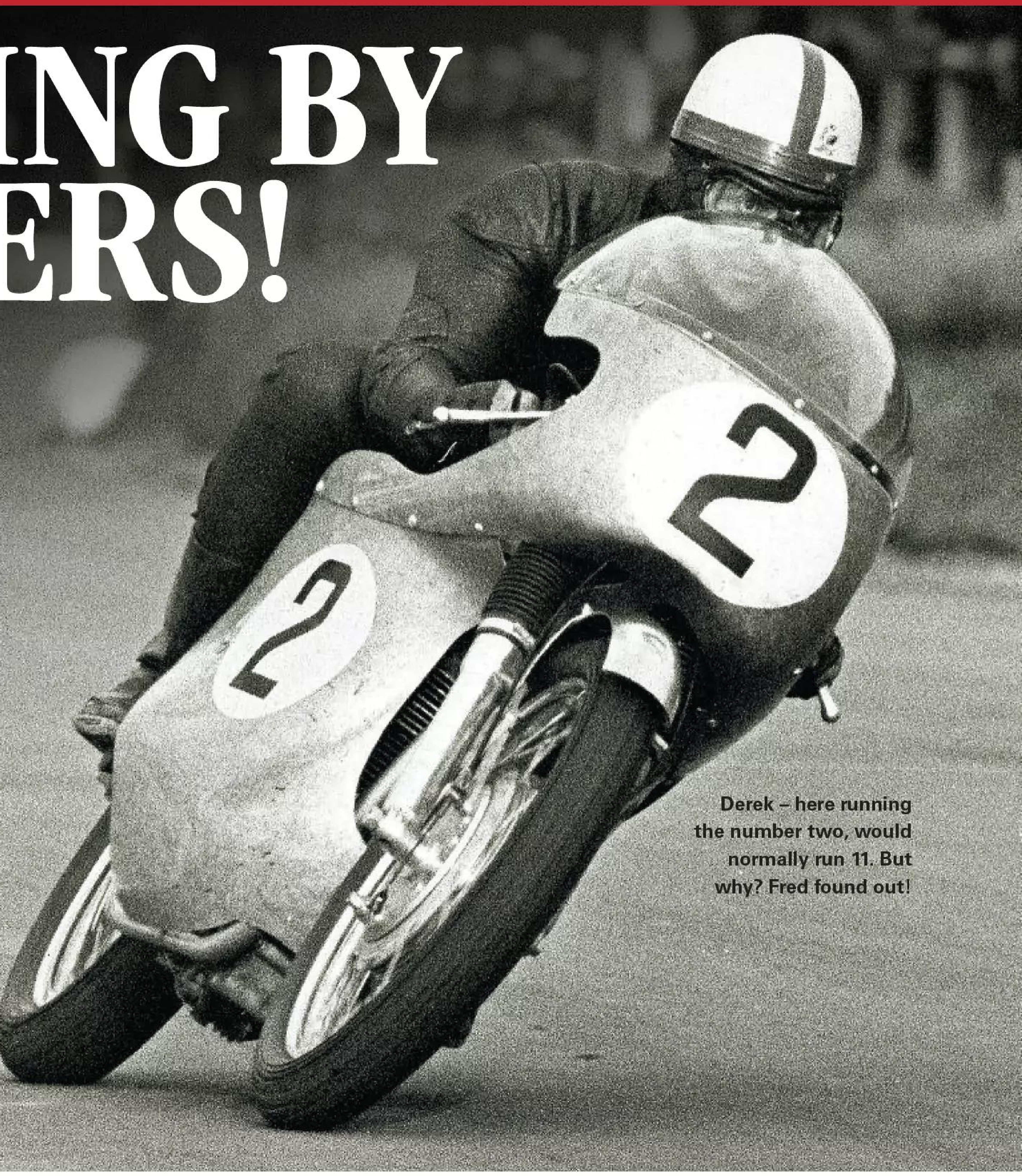
Ooops! The FZR copped a fairing full of kitty litter (left) while the TZR basks in the paddock (centre). Some nice bikes on display over the weekend too... (right.)

Fred Clarke

In his regular column for *Classic Racer,* Fred Clarke – for more than 50 years the voice of British motorcycle racing – takes us back in time for some (often fun) recollections.

Words: Fred Clarke **Photographs:** Mortons Archive

PAINTING BY NUMBERS!



Derek – here running the number two, would normally run 11. But why? Fred found out!

The 'King of Brands' according to many an experienced race-watcher!

The late Derek Minter dominated short circuit races from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. His home 'patch' was Brands Hatch, and the man from Kent won more races there than any other rider. Such was his prowess, that having just beaten multi-world champion John Surtees and his all-conquering MV Agusta, commentator Murray Walker dubbed Derek 'The King of Brands'.

It was a tag he carried proudly thereafter throughout his career. He even has part of the current Brands circuit named after him, namely 'The Minter Straight' which is somewhat contradictory as 'The Mint' never won his races on the straights, but always on the corners!

Five-times a British Champion, Derek Minter is remembered by many TT fans for being the first rider to lap the Isle of Man Mountain Course at over 100mph on a British single-cylinder machine, which he did in 1960 (Mike Hailwood also did it in that same race, but one lap later…)

Derek also won the 250cc TT of 1967on a private Honda Four – this was when the TT was Britain's round of the FIM World Championship – incidentally when post-race the Honda engine was stripped, the crankcase was found to be split in three places and would probably, as Derek said: '…not have lasted another 100 yards!'

He started 25 Grands Prix, recording eight podiums, with a best overall placing of fifth in the 500cc World Championships. A number of years back, he told me that he was relatively late in starting road racing – it was in 1955 on a BSA Gold Star and he was 23 years of age: all because his mother wasn't keen on him racing!

He also revealed that during practice sessions, particularly at the notorious Brands Hatch Paddock Hill Bend, he would purposely try all sorts of varied racing lines. People watching would often remark: 'Blimey, 'The Mints' is way off-line!' "I wasn't," he explained to me. "I would do it, knowing that come the races, there would surely be many an occasion that I would perhaps need to go wide to make an overtake – so I was thus prepared!"

I also asked him why he chose to race with the No 11? "Simple!" he replied. "When I started racing, you needed a pot of paint and a brush to put your numbers on the bikes. And I thought, well No.1, which is just a single brushstroke, is reserved for the British champion, then the next easiest, with two brushstrokes, is No. 11. Easy as that!"

King Carlo the ninth!

Fans of the now retired nine-time world champion, Valentino Rossi, will probably best remember the British Grand Prix of 2000 at Donington Park, as the meeting when the great man won his first ever 500cc Grand Prix.

However, my memories from that time also include meeting an Italian rider of the 1950s, who just like Vale, also won nine world championship crowns. And it's true to say that in his day, was every bit a popular hero, adored by the race fans, as Valentino was to become all those years later.

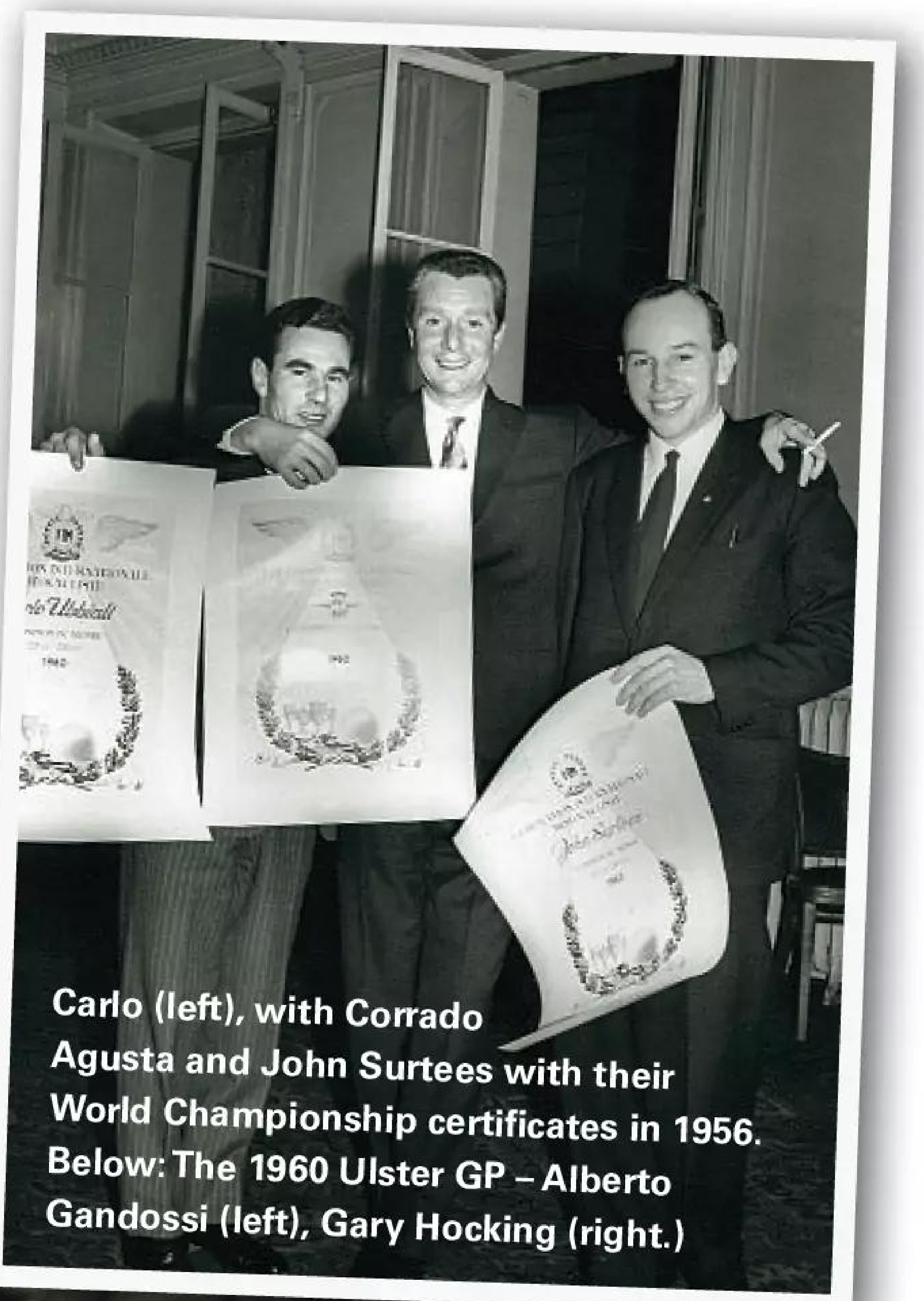
I was doing what I've always done and that was walking the paddock, hunting down information and stories that would thus find their way into my commentaries. At the time, I was talking with Italian Lucio Cecchinello, who was not only one of the riders entered in the 125 Grand Prix that weekend, alongside team-mate, Japan's Noboru 'Nobby' Ueda, but was also owner/manager and one of the riders of the GIVI Honda LCR Team. No small undertaking…

As we talked, a small elderly gentleman of ruddy complexion approached and despite never ever having seen the man in the flesh before, I recognised him immediately. Lucio started to introduce me to him, saying this is our team technical advisor, it's… At which point I interrupted and said: "Lucio, forgive me, but this is someone I recognise very well. He is one of my all-time racing heroes!" I then rather nervously shook the hand of former nine-time world champion, Carlo Ubbiali.

Unfortunately, on a personal basis, no camera was present to record the meeting, but despite Carlo's almost non-existent English, he made it clear with much smiling and back-patting that he was pleased I had recognised him.

As stated earlier, Carlo Ubbiali was a nine-time world champion: six times 125cc, three times 250cc and his Grand Prix success rate was amazing. He started 71 Grands Prix and was on the podium an incredible 68 times, which included 39 wins (five of which were the Isle of Man TT!)

Interestingly, having won his first world championship for Mondial in 1951, Carlo was to lose his crown the following year, to the British rider Cecil Sandford on an MV Agusta. Carlo was then to become team-mate to Cecil at MV, but things didn't work out, and the Brit left MV at the end of 1954, believing that he was being treated as 'second fiddle' to the Italian Carlo Ubbiali in the Italian team! Ironically, along with Carlo, Cecil Sandford was also one of my all-time heroes.



Carlo (left), with Corrado Agusta and John Surtees with their World Championship certificates in 1956. Below: The 1960 Ulster GP – Alberto Gandossi (left), Gary Hocking (right.)

Noel Baddow Pope... a 'Boy's Own' record-breaker indeed! Check out the front-wheel below!

RECORD BREAKER!

A racer, a veteran of the Second World War and a man called the 'Boy's Own' record breaker. Fred Pidcock looks at the life and times of Noel Pope.

Words: Fred Pidcock **Photographs:** Brooklands Museum, Mortons Archive

It is not unusual for a child to be given one of their parent's names as a Christian name, or forename.

It is, however, very rare for the child to be given the stage-name of a parent, but that is what happened for the subject of this feature, Noel Pope, whose middle name 'Baddow' was his father's name as a professional music-hall ventriloquist!

The name Noel came about as he was born on Christmas Eve, and that happy event took place in Toxteth, Liverpool, in 1909, his father performing locally at that time. Sadly, his father died of tuberculosis only two years later, and the young Noel Pope with his widowed mother went to live initially in Blackheath, London, then to Surbiton in Surrey, barely 10 miles from a place with which Pope's name will forever be associated, Brooklands.

It appears that his mother had inherited a considerable sum of money, and young Pope's education took him to boarding school, although it is not now clear exactly which school that was. However, what is clear is that a significant event in the lad's life happened there, as he describes in the opening lines of his 1952 autobiography 'Full Chat': "An inky-faced schoolboy persistently missing prayers to peer through the school railings and watch Lawrence of Arabia riding by on his Brough! It would result in a visit to a child psychologist nowadays… So, the germ of a lifetime's devotion to the risks and thrills of motorcycling and racing was born in me – and in very fertile soil."

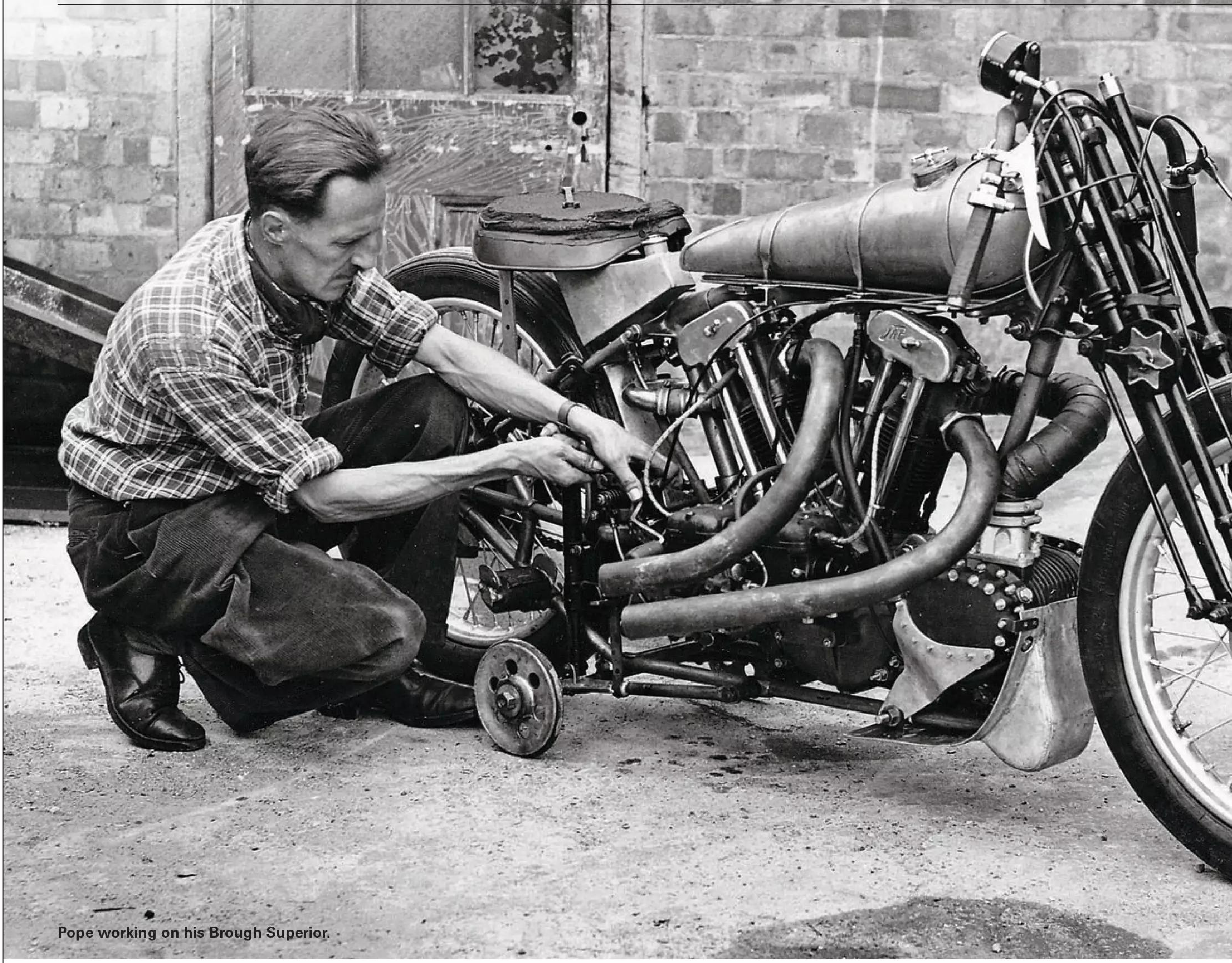
On leaving school, he is known to have begun an engineering course at University College London, but left it in 1930, his departure possibly linked to him being fined £3 for obstructing a police constable during a stunt in University Rag Week! However, he later did complete an electrical engineering course at the nearby Faraday House college, earning a diploma, which as a trade qualification was quite well thought of in those days.

Biking beginnings

Noel Pope's first motorcycle was an old side-valve Matchless, bought by his mother as his transport after he left school. It was on one of his visits to relations in Boston, Lincolnshire, that he met Austin Munks, then at the beginning of a long and successful racing career, and who was later a notable sponsor of up-and-coming road-racers. Their friendship led to impromptu races on grass and on the

ABOVE: Noel Pope astride the supercharged Brough Superior, Brooklands, before a record attempt, 1939.

RIGHT: Pope checks over his Norton.



Pope working on his Brough Superior.

An early passion for Broughs came from his childhood, watching T E Lawrence ride his!

beaches around the Wash, but the limitations of the old Matchless were obvious, and on Pope's 21st birthday it went in part-exchange for a 350cc Zenith-JAP racer, the deal arranged with Comerfords of Thames Ditton, the first act of a long and productive association with that company.

Noel Pope's competitive debut came in March 1933, riding the Zenith in the Brooklands Clubman's Day, but as he says in his autobiography, the results impressed nobody, himself included, but: "…the sight of the huge British Anzani reclining like a camel in Comerfords' window," certainly did impress him, and it soon replaced the Zenith.

On his next outing, again at Brooklands, the combination of the instability of the Anzani and the erratic riding of its rider caused race officials to consider banning them, only relenting with a stern warning that he would be very closely watched in future.

In July he entered the 50-mile New Zealand Trophy race at Brooklands, which necessitated a seven-gallon tank to be made up and fitted. So much weight, so high up, on a 'camel' of a bike was a recipe for disaster, only averted by the fierce vibration of the Anzani causing flaking of the galvanising on the inside of the tank which blocked the carburettor jets within a mile or so of the start.

Needless in a haystack!

In a very short paragraph in 'Full Chat', Pope says that his plans for the season were then cut short by an injury to his wrist, but gave no further details. Jeff Clew describes the events that led to the injury in his 1978 biography of Francis Beart, 'A Single Purpose'. One day, with Beart driving an aged Austin Seven, Pope as front seat passenger, Charles Mortimer Snr and Freddie Clarke in the rear, Pope spotted an old haystack just off the public road by the Brooklands Byfleet banking, and before anyone could stop him, Pope had wrenched the steering wheel from Beart and swung the car hard over to 'attack' the haystack, just for the hell of it.

Unfortunately, the little Austin reacted badly to the unexpected change of direction, went down a bank and rolled over, ejecting its occupants who all suffered minor injuries, Beart breaking a little finger and Clarke a collar-bone. Pope and Mortimer escaped with cuts, bruises and assorted sprains, but no bones broken.

Pope also acquired a 350cc Velocette from

ABOVE: Noel Pope outside the Castrol Depot in 1935.

a fellow engineering student whose fiancé had issued the ultimatum: 'Me or it – choose!' With it, Pope entered the Manx Grand Prix where, in early, unofficial practice on open roads, he came across what he termed 'calling cards' left by a herd of cows at Laurel Bank, and crashed, luckily without too much damage to machine or rider. In the race he retired when an exhaust valve dropped in, the winner being Austin Munks on another Velocette. That was the only MGP that Pope contested.

The Anzani suffered a major blow-up at Brooklands in September, although Pope had built up such a lead at that point that he coasted in to finish 2nd, having also bagged a Brooklands Gold Star for a lap at 105.29mph, his first of five such awards. These Gold Stars could only be won during a BMCRC (British Motorcycle Racing Club) race meeting, and a rider could win one award for each machine category. According to BMCRC records, 176 were awarded between 1922 and 1939, when the circuit closed as a race venue.

That mechanical catastrophe for the Anzani brought about a significant close-season development for Pope, as he says in 'Full Chat': "A windfall came my way. It altered the whole outlook, making possible a new Velo and Barry's Brough (which was up for sale on his retirement)." 'Barry' was Edward (Ted) Baragwanath, and the supercharged 1000cc Brough had already taken its brave rider to many wins and records.

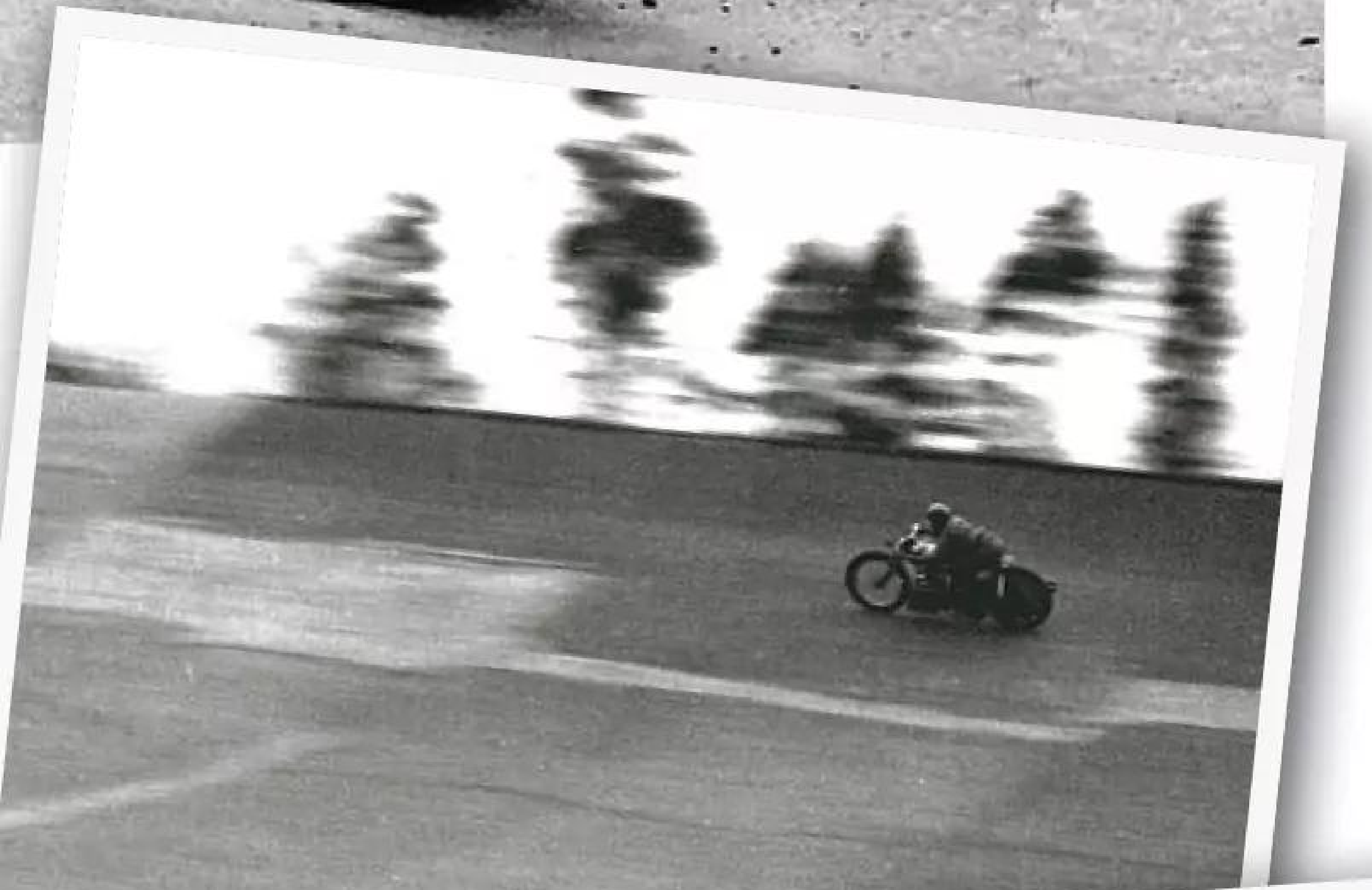
The new Mk.IV KTT pitched its owner Pope down the road at Donington after a sprocket came loose, but he then won a 50-mile handicap at Brooklands which encouraged him to enter the TT, where he again came off the machine at the Mountain Box after waving to friends and running onto the grass. He was to go on to race each year in the TT until 1948, riding in both Junior and Senior events, his highest places being 5th on his Senior Nortons, in 1938 and 1948.

At first the big Brough was very fast for short distances but prone to give trouble in longer events, nevertheless the wins were starting to come at sprints like at Gatwick and Brighton.

Both machines were rebuilt for the 1935 season, as was the Anzani, which was put together as a '750' with a view to trying for a Gold Star in that category before selling it on. Continuing the Brooklands record-breaking theme, only two 'Double Gold Star' awards were ever made, these were for lapping at over 120mph, the first being Noel Pope on the Brough in 1935 at 120.59mph, just in time as his rival Eric Fernihough clocked a 120mph lap the following day, and followed that up a month later with a lap at 123.58mph.

In 'Full Chat' Pope writes: "We did not know it at the time, of course, but it was destined to stand again untouched for quite a few years. Ferni and I made a pal's pact not to have another go at it until the bonus was made much more attractive and in keeping with our efforts." Pope's description in 'Full Chat' of riding Brooklands at outright record lap speeds is a fascinating insight into what only Eric Fernihough and he himself had experienced. 1935 also marked Pope's first Grand Prix, the GP of Europe that year, the 'Ulster', and the sale, after an unsuccessful attempt at a Gold Star, of the Anzani.

A 500cc Norton was added to the stable for 1936 with immediate successes at Brooklands, including a 500cc Gold Star for a lap at 105.07, running on dope. By his own admission, in 1937 he was trying to do the impossible. "I was rushing all over Europe to do the GP races, then coming back to Brooklands to do the big races there but having a go at records as well."



TOP: Noel Pope on his Brough on the Byfleet Banking, Brooklands, and, above, Pope on a Velocette at 'The Fork' at Brooklands.

Pope at Governor's Bridge at the 1947 Isle of Man TT.

Over the winter he had designed and built a 500cc track machine, the Pope-JAP, and thankfully the Brough was becoming more reliable and rideable after steady and painstaking development. The Velo soon gave way to a 350 Norton mainly for some consistency in parts and spares, and 1938 brought Pope's fifth Gold Star with a lap at 103.54mph on the Brough with a sidecar attached, followed a week later by a lap at 106.60mph, a record that was never broken, and which will now stand for all time.

Of the solo lap record attempt on July 4, 1939, Pope says: "I had at last managed to overcome all the troubles encountered during the years I had owned the Brough, but now Nature took a hand – every time I opened the shed and pushed the nose of the Brough out, it rained! Finally I had George Reynolds down on the first reasonable day to time my effort officially. It was a day far from perfect with high gusty winds and wet patches all over the track…throwing caution to the winds, completed a record lap at 124.51 which I am certain could have been much higher in ideal conditions. But I little knew that in fact this was my final effort and never was I to make another attempt on the Brooklands record."

A pause for war

Having received his military call-up papers while at the TT in June 1939, Noel Pope arrived on Salisbury Plain in the following month as a regular army officer in the Royal Army Service Corps, assigned to training motorcycle dispatch riders. This 'tolerable situation' continued in France in the early years of the war until he was back home where he was to start up a Motorcycle Instructor's School in Surrey, followed by a longer spell serving in North Africa.

Strangely, as he had a very active and involved war, those times hardly get a mention in his autobiography, and even when they do, it is usually about some character he met up with, almost always including motorcycles, however it is clear from various sources that he was evacuated as part of the Dunkerque 'miracle', returning during the D-Day Normandy landings, and was later in one of the early units to enter a shattered Berlin.

As peace and some semblance of normality began to return, Noel Pope was one of the founder-members of the postwar British Motorcycle Racing Club (Bemsee), and a committee member.

A priority for the club was to find a suitable venue to resume racing, and Dunholme in Lincolnshire proved to be a success, although not everyone liked the flat expanse of the airfield runways. The perimeter road at Haddenham airfield was tried and was good, but too narrow for a field of reasonable size, while Blandford army camp had everything desired for road racing. For Noel Pope though, the speed record attempts were always the big attraction, even though Brooklands could never again be used for speed events, the Brough was crying out to be used, and after making fastest time of the day on the wet Redcar sands, the bike was totally stripped, and with backing from Comerfords, a plan was hatched in February 1949 to attack the world record, held from 1939 by Ernst Henne on a streamlined, blown BMW, at 173 mph.

Bonneville beckons…

The salt flats of Bonneville were chosen for the attempt, and after a rebuild fraught with problems and set-backs which resulted in the bike missing the sailing of the cargo vessel booked for transport, the squad (and the Brough) travelled to New York in style on the 'Queen Elizabeth'.

Even with the later sailing date, time was so tight that the Brough and its enclosing shell were packed for shipment before the engine had been tested in the bike as a complete assembly. George Brough was forced to follow later as he needed an operation on his eye, but Pope and the crew arrived at the salt flats more or less on time, only to find that the 'flats' were in fact a series of ripples, apparently the result of the prevailing wind conditions whilst the salt dried in the previous August, necessitating an eight-mile 'runway' to be cut, from which it was most advisable not

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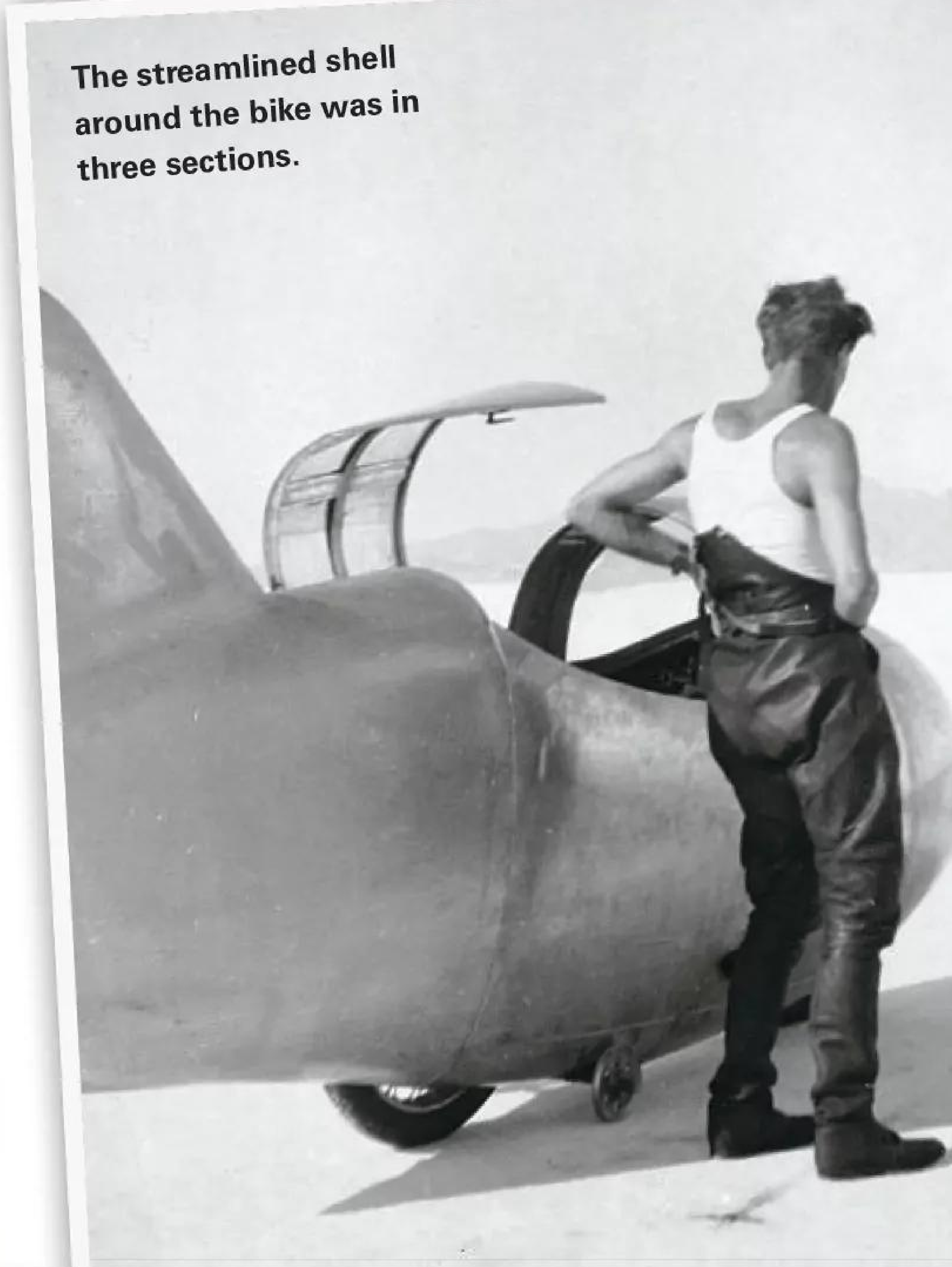
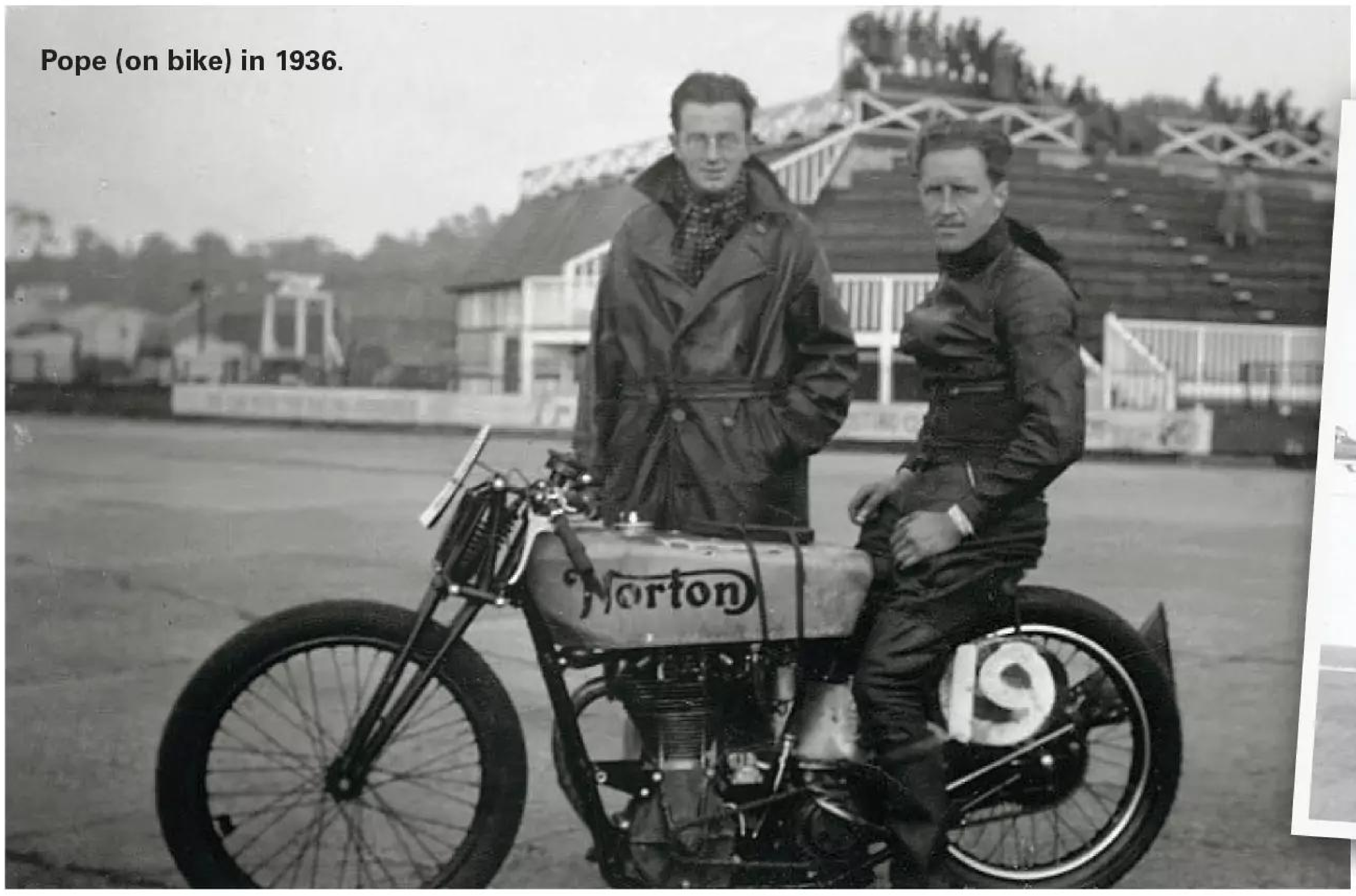
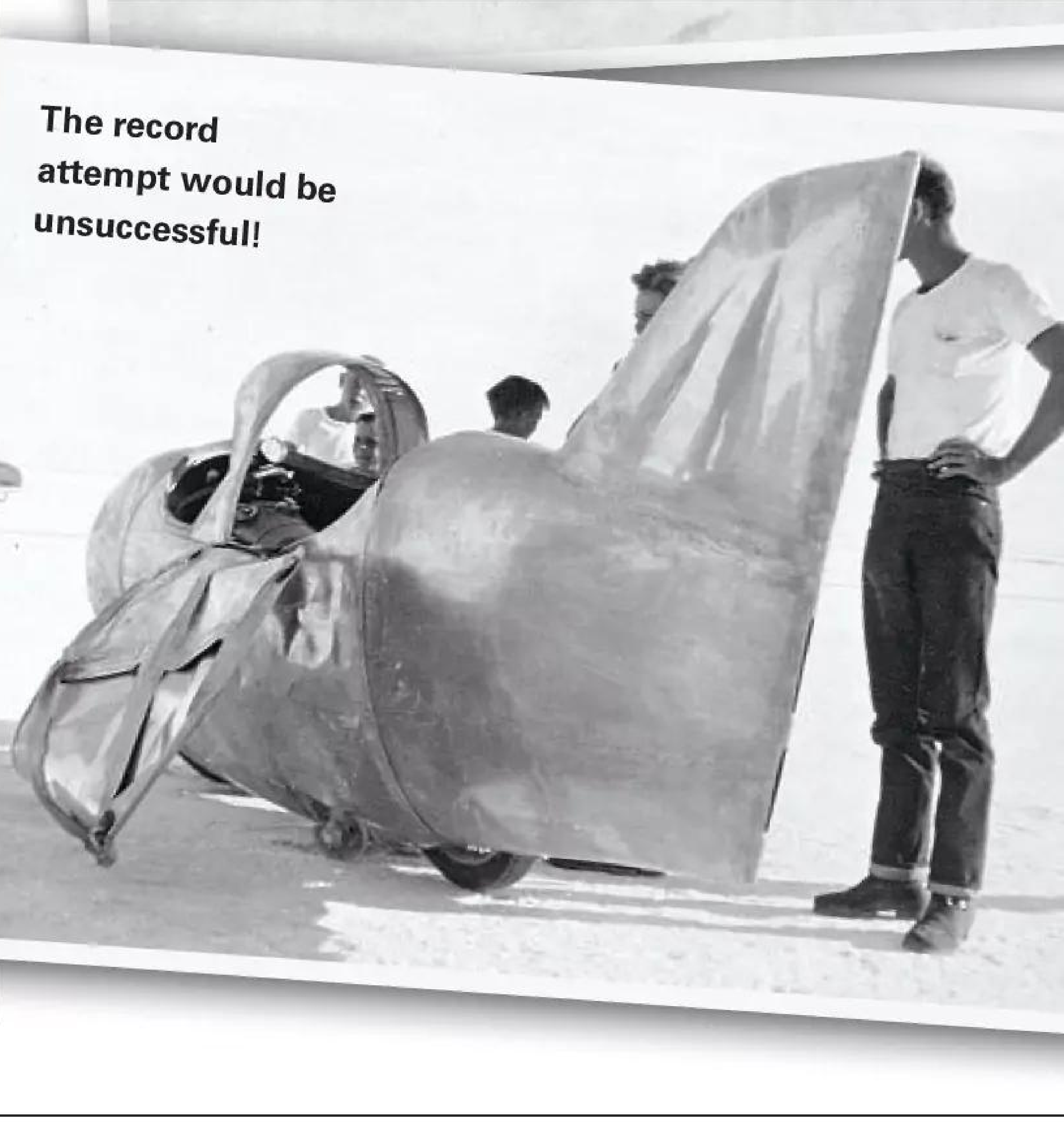
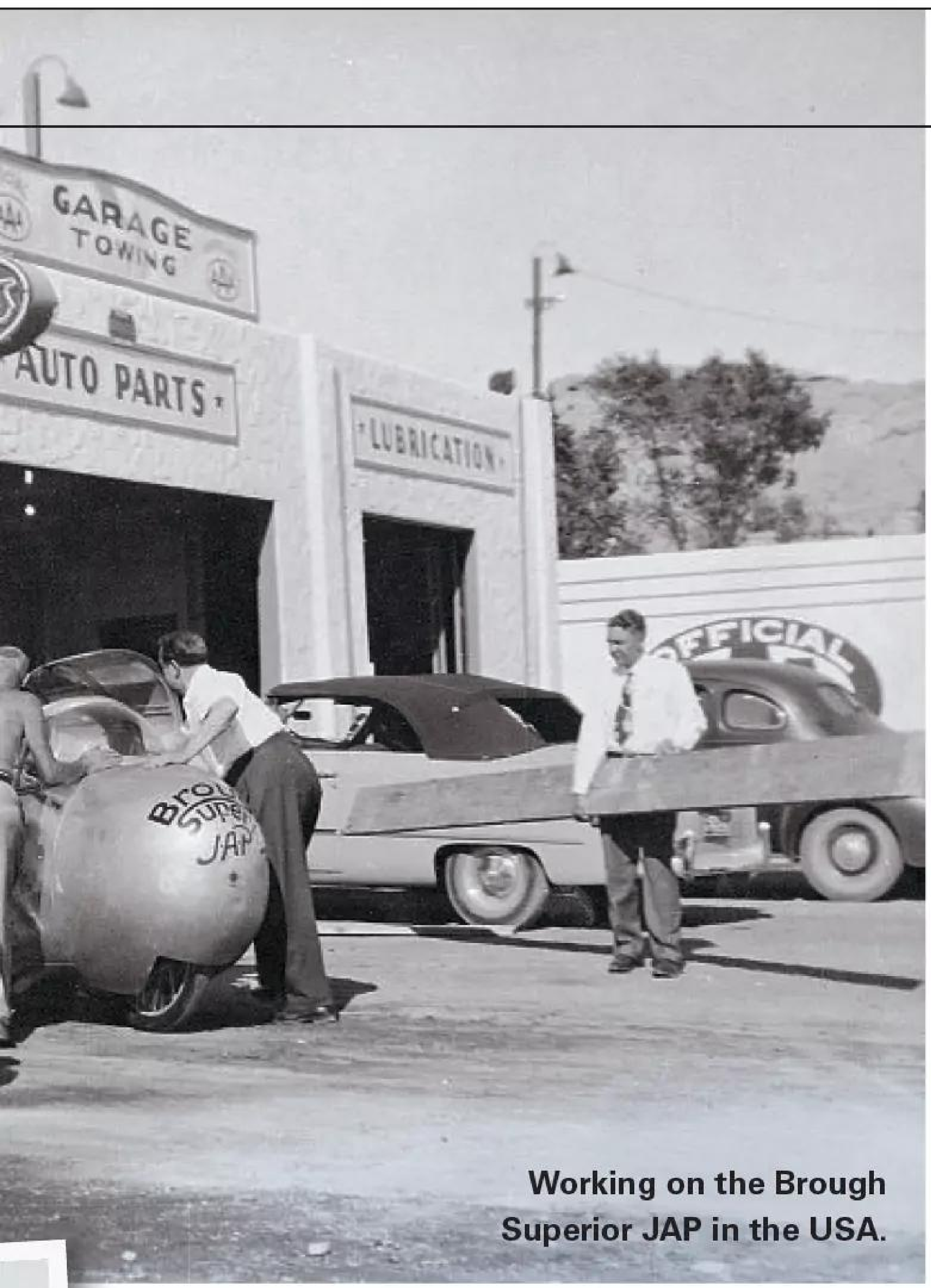
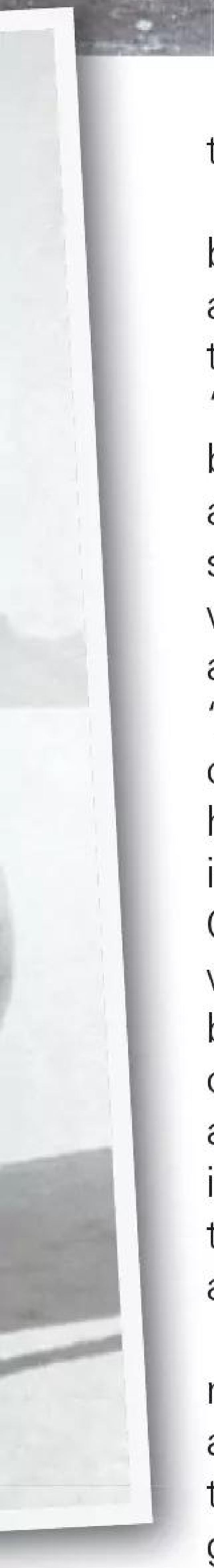

The streamlined shell around the bike was in three sections.


Pope (on bike) in 1936.


The record attempt would be unsuccessful!



Working on the Brough Superior JAP in the USA.



to deviate, certainly not at speed.

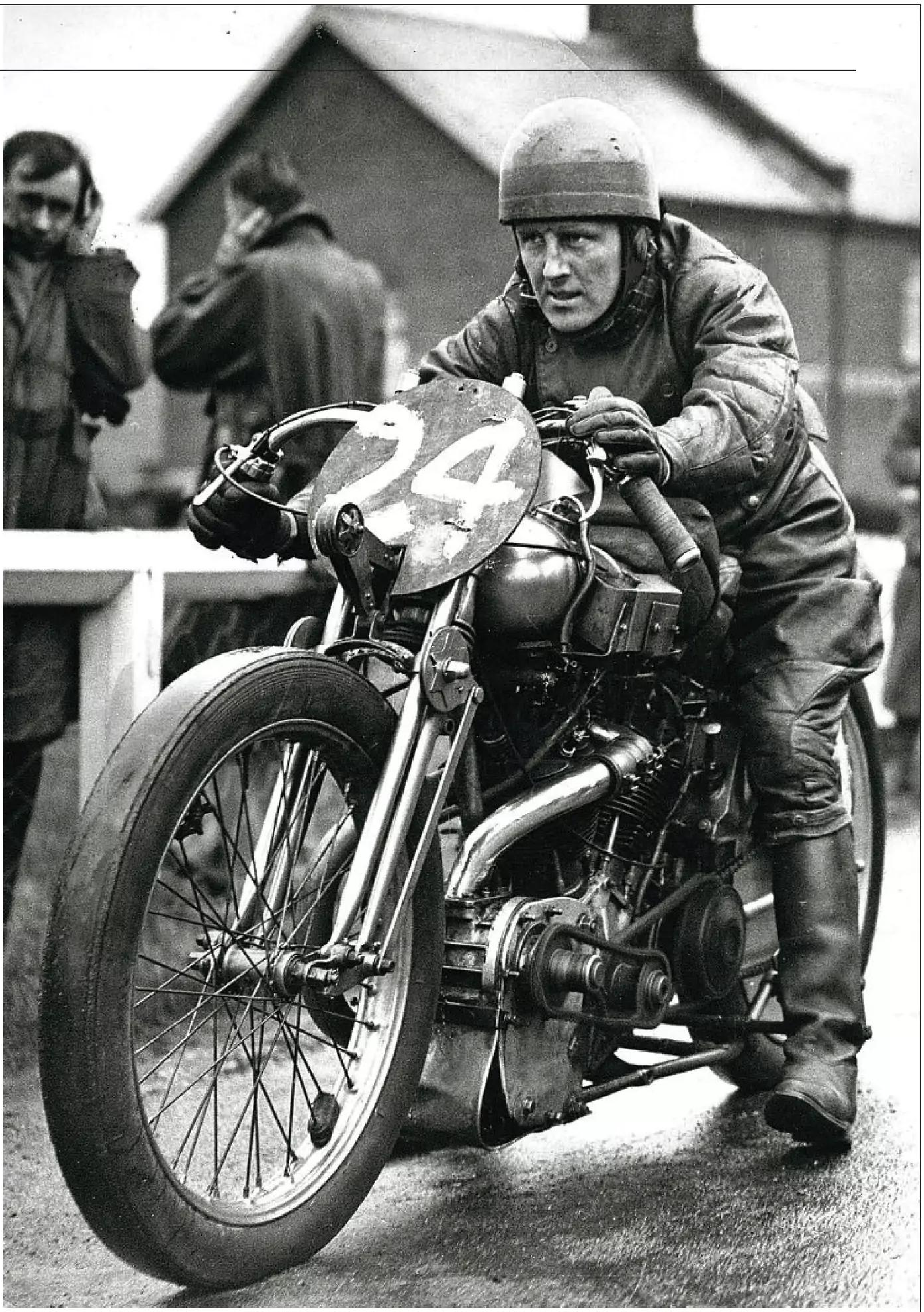
The next problem was that the Brough had been held by US Customs in New York, finally arriving 10 days late, and unfortunately with the three sections of the streamlined shell: "…laying battered on top of each other in the bottom of the crate!" Hastily-bought hand tools and brute force were used to persuade the shell to fit, and initial runs started. Unfortunately, when up around 150mph, the Brough drifted a little away from the guiding black line on the 'runway' and no amount of shifting of weight could get it back on-line: the resulting crash had the whole machine sideways and thrown into the air, Pope being thrown out. From 'Full Chat' again: "At first I had been beating the bike, which now not only proceeded to catch me up, but passed me as well by the simple process of rolling over on top of me, making my ribs feel as though it were at least a steam-roller. I sat up in the middle of that vast expanse of salt and thought how utterly stupid it was to have come all this way just to fall off!"

A few days later, battered and bruised but with no bones broken, Pope attempted a couple of additional runs, but intense vibration, later found to be caused by a broken frame and damaged gearbox, limited speeds to 140-150mph.

The final TT

Noel Pope's last TT was the 1948 Senior, and he signed off with an excellent 5th place. The last couple of paragraphs of the Foreword to 'Full Chat' are illuminating as regards his latter days in the sport he loved: "The runners I knew gave up either through becoming too long in the tooth or because they came to feel as Jimmy Simpson must have felt when he retired and said: 'The thrill has gone'. For myself I did neither. I should most certainly have become one of the former. But through life's queer twists I have just wandered away a little, as it were, without ever officially retiring. Scarcely farther away from the game than the paddock, I still look on with lively zest. The thrill has never waned, for me."

'Wandered away a little' he may have done, but that spirit of adventure and sporting endeavour stayed with him all his life, playing for Esher Rugby Club in his younger days, then, when the racing and record-breaking began to wind down, he took up parachute jumping and sub-aqua diving, especially enjoying searching the Mediterranean sea-bed for wrecks and sunken treasure, even looking for a lost city in the Atlantic.



Noel Pope at the Gatwick circuit.

The arts were not neglected, he was a member of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and in his later years was vice-chairman of an avant-garde art organisation. He wrote and had published, as well as his autobiography, a number of science-fiction stories, and founded the newspaper 'Surbiton News', which later became 'Borough News', the 'Borough' being that of Kingston-upon-Thames.

The motorcycling connection remained strong, a Comerford's advert in 1952 included 'Tuning for speed under the supervision of N.B. Pope', and he was President of the Kingston and District Motorcycle Club.

In September 1940 he had married Daphne Jeanne DuPont, also of Surbiton, and they had two sons, Lawrence Robert born in 1941, and Timothy Baddow, born in 1943. Evidence from various Electoral Registers suggests that Noel and Daphne had separated sometime between 1952 and 1954.

Noel Pope died in Surbiton Hospital in 1971, of cancer. After his funeral, a party was held in the saloon bar of 'The Plough' pub in Ewell Road, Surbiton, which had become his local. Noel's son Lawrence explained that this was the way his father would have wanted it, with friends gathered round enjoying a drink and a laugh in his memory.

Noel Baddow Pope: December 24, 1909 – March 23, 1971. CR

■ Thanks to Beatrice Meecham and Tom Brown of the Brooklands Museum, for their help in compiling this article, and to David Kennedy PhD. for permission to use his 2018 paper 'A Quest for Speed' as a valuable reference.

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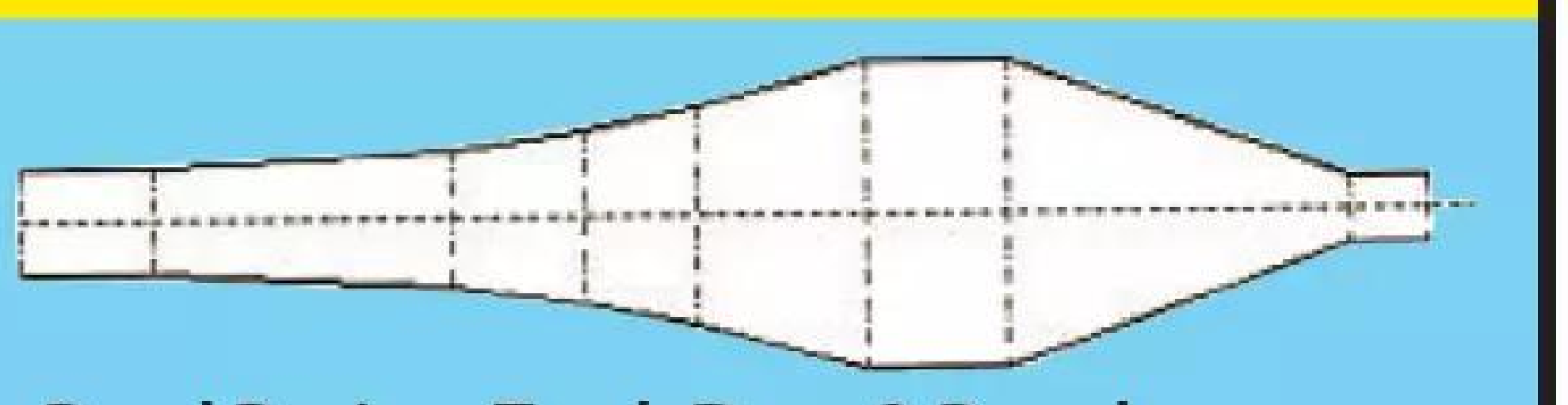

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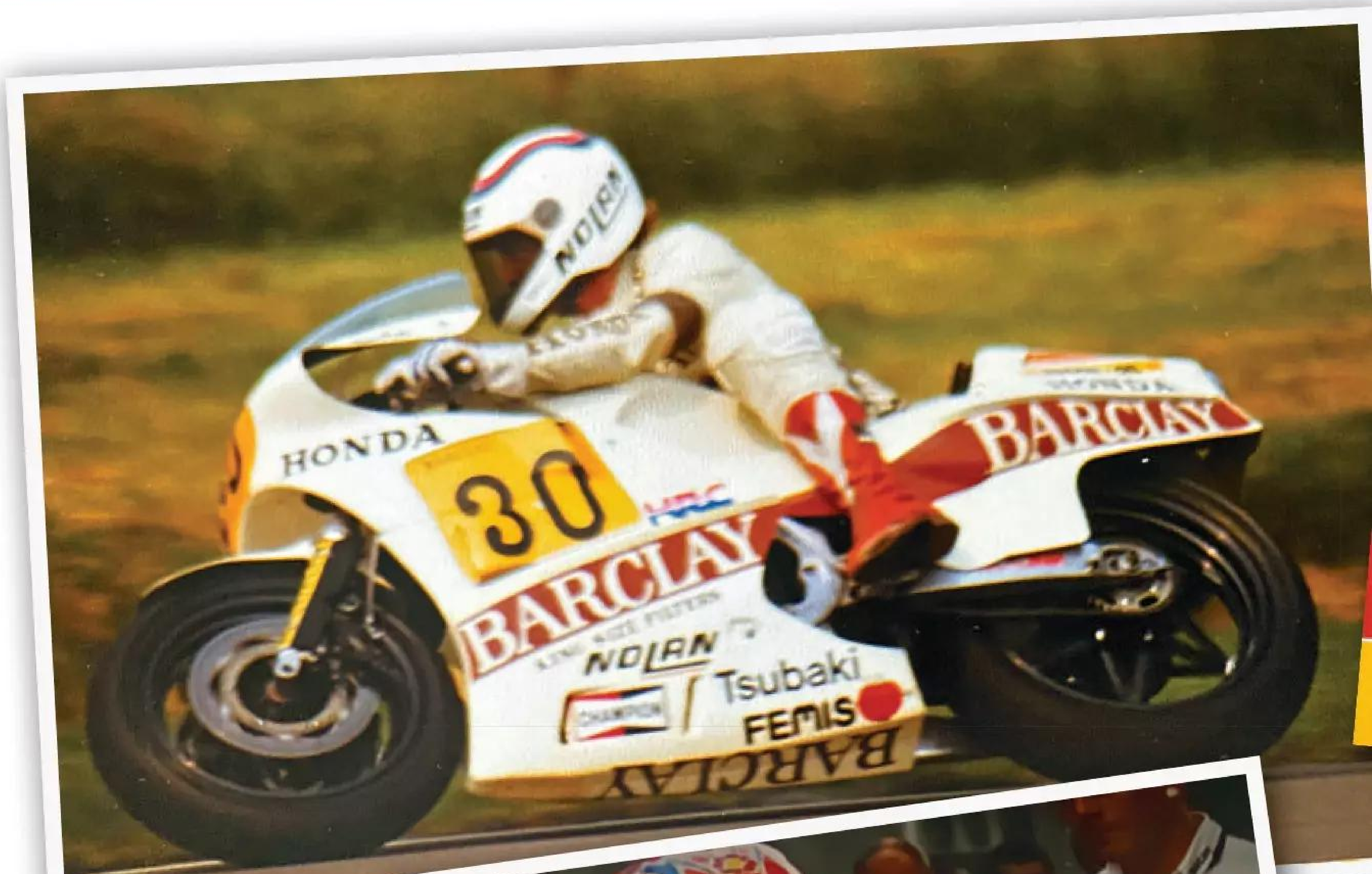
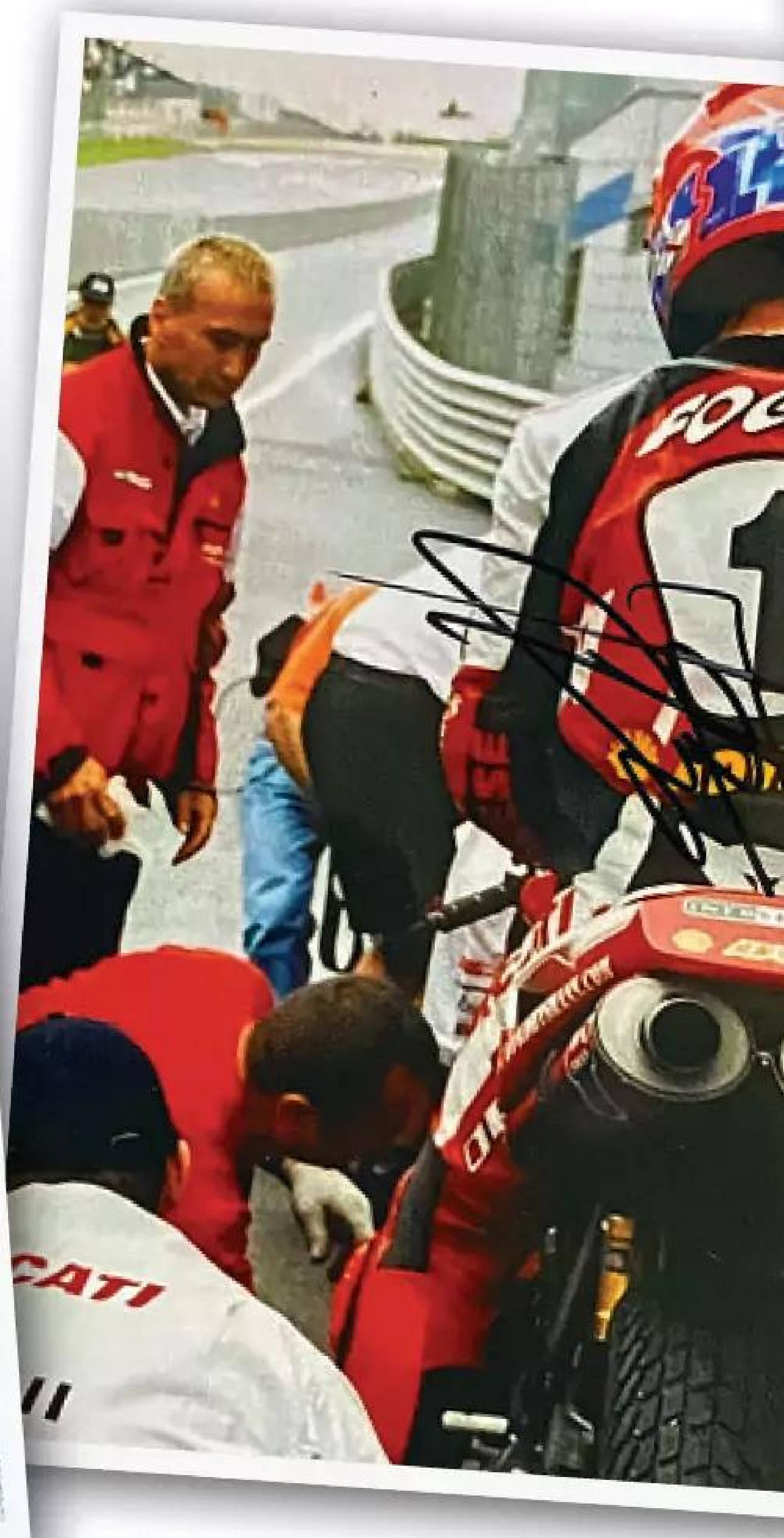
WOLFGANG SCHATZMAIR SAYS: "It's always a pleasure for me to see my photos in your great magazine! You missed a few off last issue, so here they are again. From the early 1980s we have Jack Middelburg, Franco Uncini and Randy Mamola.

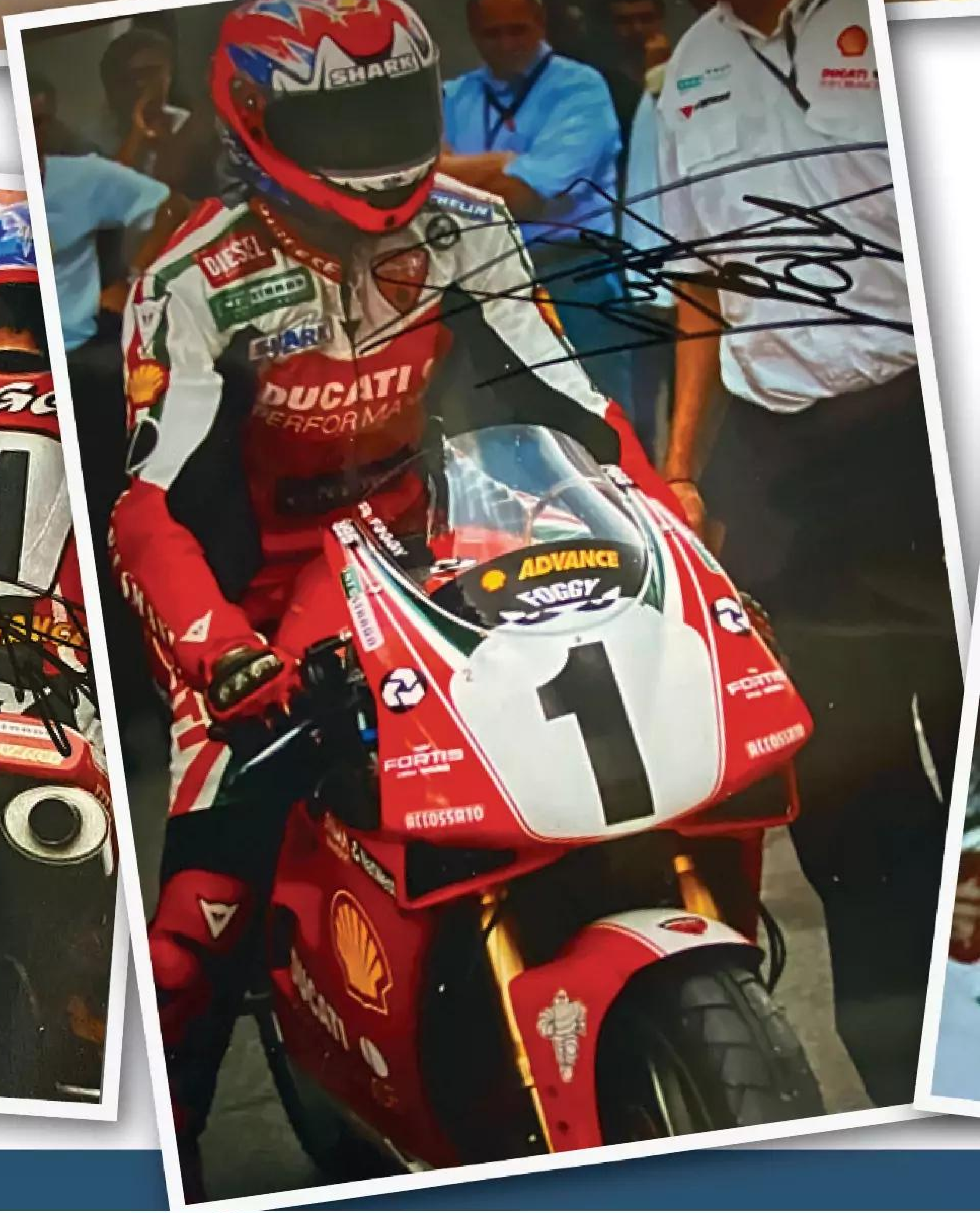
Here also are photos of the race programme and the seven-time world champion Rolf Biland/Kurt Waltisperg during their last race because the LCR/BRM Swissauto was sold. I hope some sidecar enthusiast readers enjoy.

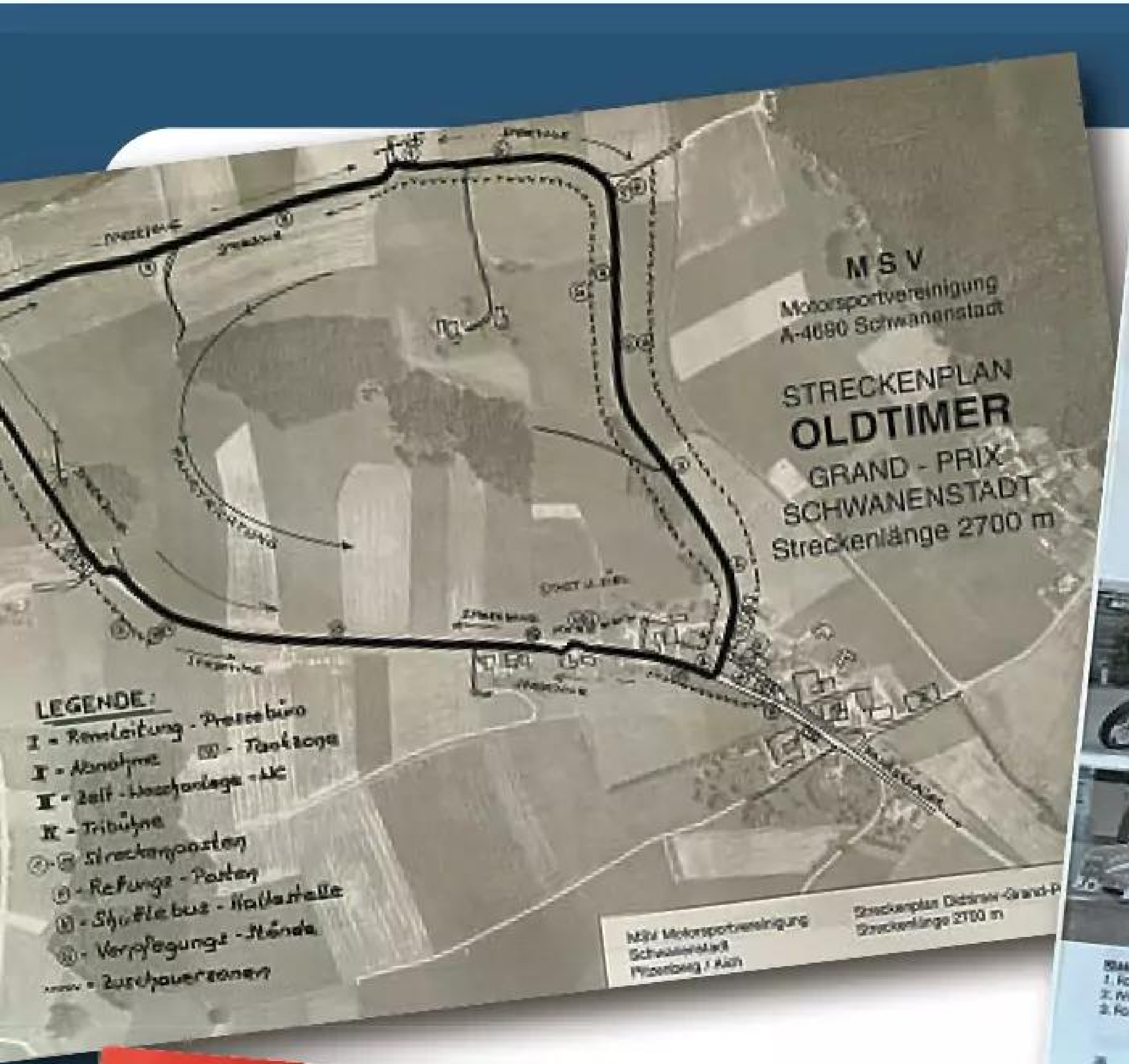
And finally, pictures of Carl Fogarty on the way to his fourth WSBK title. I was able to take three photos in 1999 in the pit-lane of the A1 Ring, now called the Red Bull Ring.

In one photo you can see Davide Tardozzi on the left-side. In race one, Colin Edwards on the Honda RC45 won, and 2nd place went to Foggy and 3rd was Vittoriano Guareschi on a Yamaha. Race two was won by Pier Francesco Chili on the Alstare Suzuki, 2nd place went to Troy Corser on a Ducati and 3nd was Aaron Slight on a Honda. Recently, I met King Carl Fogarty during the Schwanenstadt-Classics, where he was a star guest and obviously had fun. He said the course was similar to Scarborough. I hope you and the readers like the photos."









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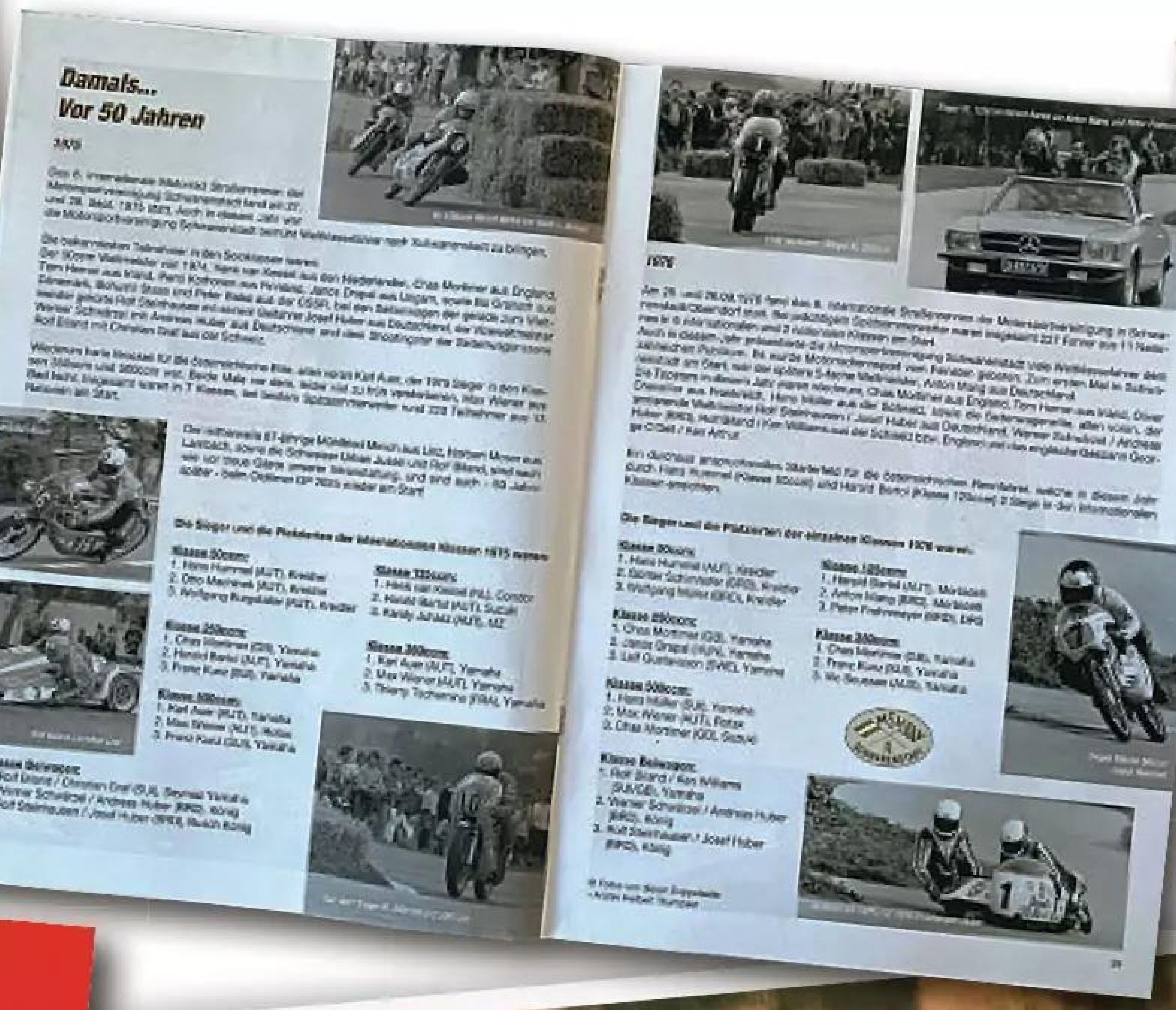
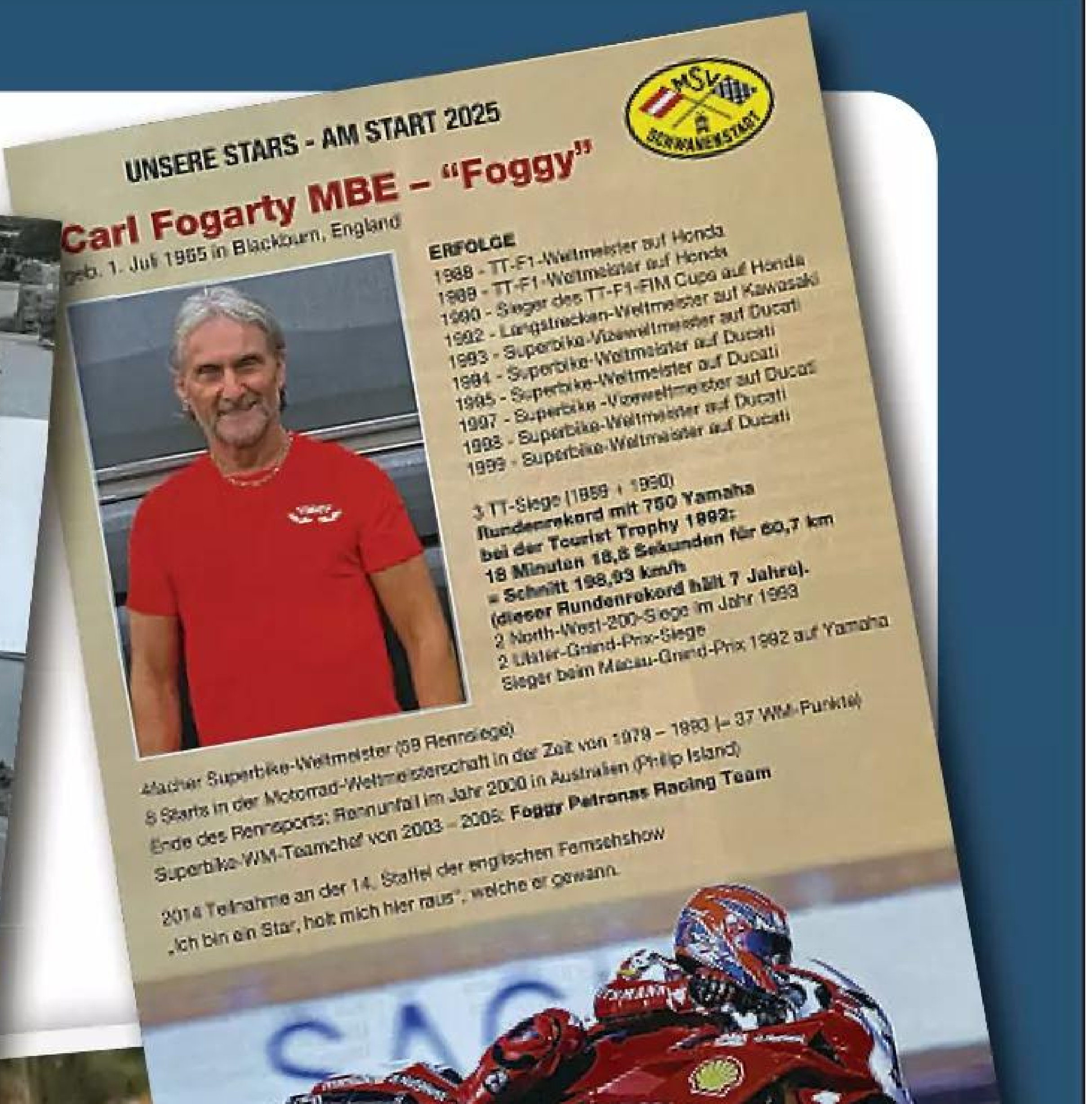
Streckenplan Oldtimer-Grand-P
Streckenlänge 2700 m



Damals...
Vor 50 Jahren

1975

1976



UNSERE STARS - AM START 2025

Carl Fogarty MBE – "Foggy"

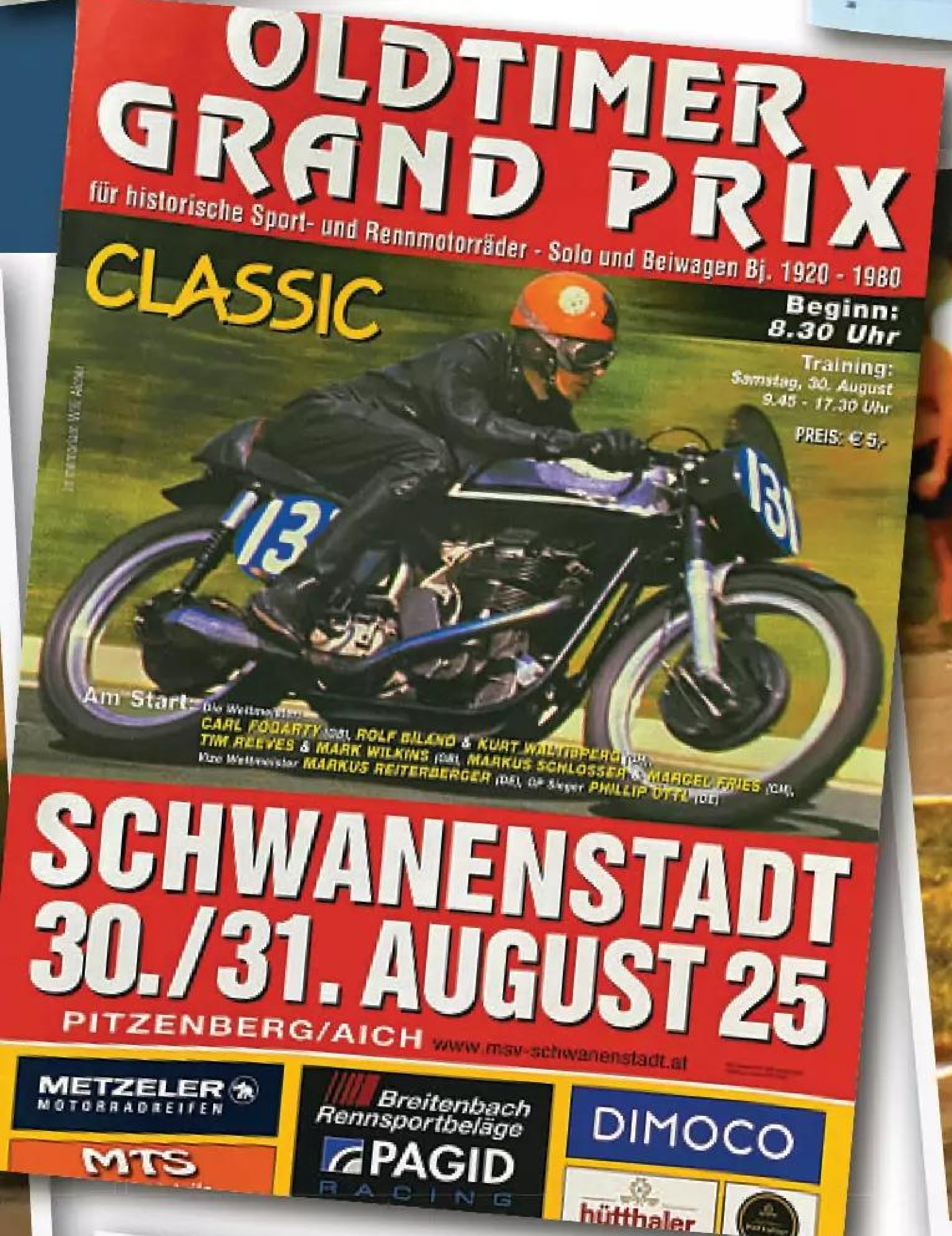
Geb. 1. Juli 1965 in Blackburn, England

ERFOLGE
1988 - TT-F1-Weltmeister auf Honda
1989 - TT-F1-Weltmeister auf Honda
1990 - Sieger des TT-F1-FIM Cups auf Honda
1992 - Langstrecken-Weltmeister auf Kawasaki
1993 - Superbike-Vizeweltmeister auf Ducati
1994 - Superbike-Weltmeister auf Ducati
1995 - Superbike-Weltmeister auf Ducati
1997 - Superbike -Vizeweltmeister auf Ducati
1998 - Superbike-Weltmeister auf Ducati
1999 - Superbike-Weltmeister auf Ducati

3 TT-Siege (1989 + 1990)
Rundenrekord mit 750 Yamaha bei der Tourist Trophy 1992: 18 Minuten 18,8 Sekunden für 60,7 km = Schnitt 198,93 km/h (dieser Rundenrekord hält 7 Jahre).
2 North-West-200-Siege im Jahr 1993
2 Ulster-Grand-Prix-Siege
Sieger beim Macau-Grand-Prix 1992 auf Yamaha

4facher Superbike-Weltmeister (59 Rennsiege)
8 Starts in der Motorrad-Weltmeisterschaft in der Zeit von 1979 – 1993 (= 37 WM-Punkte)
Ende des Rennsports: Rennunfall im Jahr 2000 in Australien (Philip Island)
Superbike-WM-Teamchef von 2003 – 2006: **Foggy Petronas Racing Team**

2014 Teilnahme an der 14. Staffel der englischen Fernsehshow „Ich bin ein Star, holt mich hier raus", welche er gewann.



OLDTIMER GRAND PRIX

für historische Sport- und Rennmotorräder - Solo und Beiwagen Bj. 1920 - 1980

CLASSIC

Beginn:
8.30 Uhr

Training:
Samstag, 30. August
9.45 - 17.30 Uhr

PREIS: € 5,-

Am Start: die Weltmeister
CARL FOGARTY (GB), ROLF BILAND & KURT WALTISPERG (CH),
TIM REEVES & MARK WILKINS (GB), MARKUS SCHLOSSER & MARCEL FRIES (CH),
Vize Weltmeister MARKUS REITERBERGER (DE), GP Sieger PHILLIP ÖTTL (DE)

SCHWANENSTADT
30./31. AUGUST 25

PITZENBERG/AICH www.msv-schwanenstadt.at

METZELER MOTORRADREIFEN
Breitenbach Rennsportbeläge
PAGID RACING
DIMOCO
MTS
hütthaler

DAINESE
DUCATI

SCHLOSSGOLD

HB SUZUKI
HB International
MICHELIN

Next Issue

#237 – on sale December 18, 2025

SILVER DREAM RACERS:

PART ONE OF THE CURIOUS STORY OF BRITISH RACE FACTORY ARMSTRONG, A TRAIL-BLAZING FEMALE TEAM BOSS AND THE SILVER DREAM RACER!

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO:

HARRY PEARCE

ICONIC METAL:

SUZUKI RG680

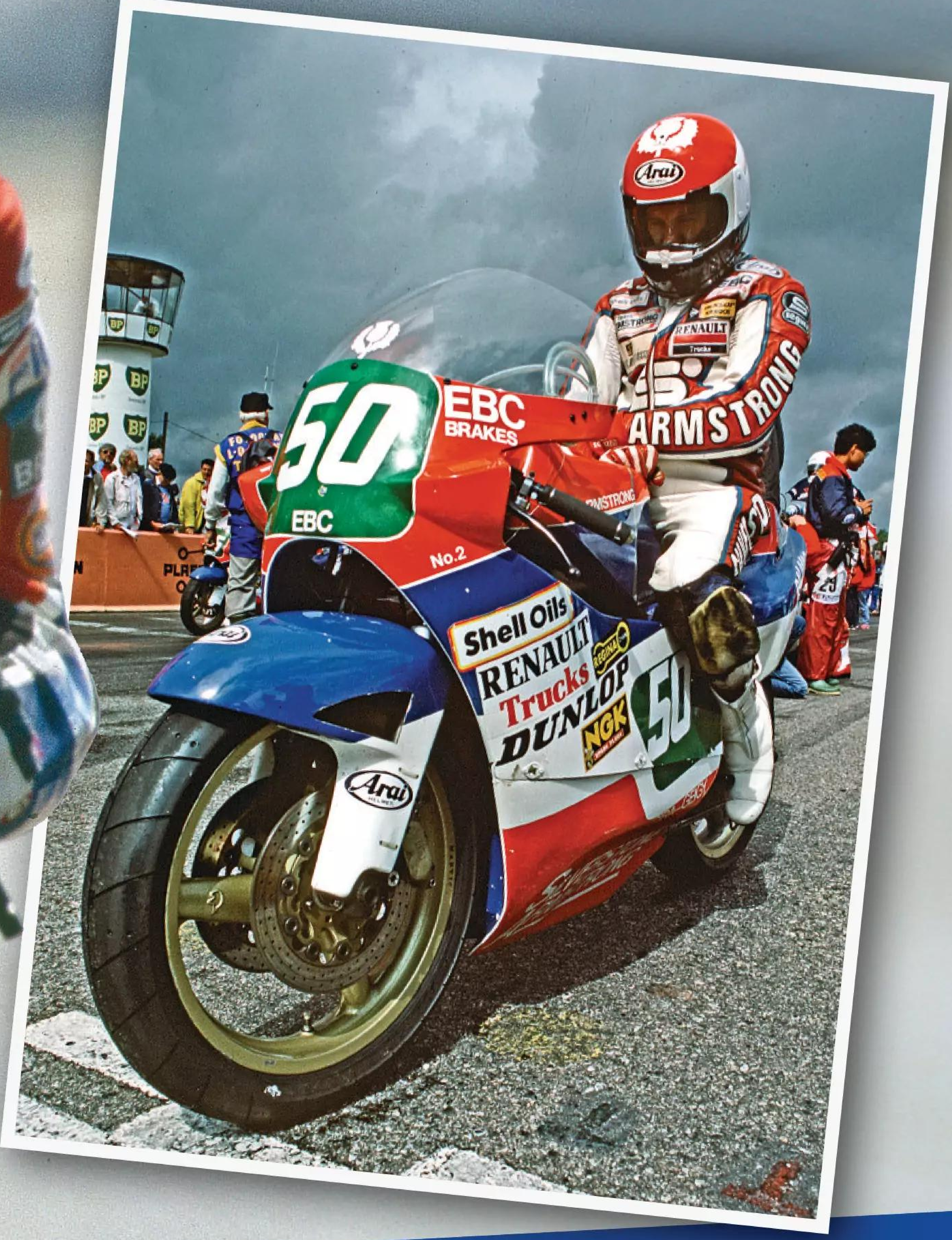
HERON SUZUKI
SUZUKI
7
TEXACO
HERON

FILA
ADVANCE

Photos: Mark Wernham/Mortons Archive, Don Morley/Hitchcocks Archive, Terry Joslin.

PLUS

YOUR RACE PICTURES FROM 'BACK IN THE DAY'; THE FRED CLARKE COLUMN; WIN WITH OUR CROSSWORD; AND MUCH, MUCH MORE! *



CHAMPION

NEIL HODGSON TAKES THE WORLD SUPERBIKE TITLE AT LAST!

*The next issue of *Classic Racer* is on sale on December 18, 2025. The editor reserves the right to move things about a bit, depending on space available, to bring you the best motorcycle racing features from across many decades! So, don't moan at him if something isn't in the mag – instead, why not get a subscription? Check out page 22.

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ENQUIRIES

Bonhams Motorcycles
Milton Keynes (Head Office)
+44 (0) 20 8963 2817
motorcycles@bonhams.com

International Dept Director
+44 (0) 20 8963 2819
ben.walker@bonhams.com

Head of Department (UK)
+44 (0) 20 8963 2818
james.stensel@bonhams.com

Senior Specialist
+44 (0) 20 8963 2822
bill.to@bonhams.com

Specialist
+44 (0) 20 7468 8258
andrew.barrett@bonhams.com

Lancs, Yorks, Cheshire,
N. Counties & Scotland
+44 (0) 7811 899 905
mark.garside@bonhams.com

Midlands, Peak District & Wales
+44 (0) 7710 615 868
phil.ingle@bonhams.com

Lincs & East Anglia
+44 (0) 1507 481 890
David Hawtin

Leics, Northants, Herts, Beds,
Bucks & Oxon
+44 (0) 7973 661 051
martin.heckscher@bonhams.com

London, Berks, Kent, Surrey & Sussex
+44 (0) 7774 747 017
david.hancock@bonhams.com

Hampshire & Dorset
+44 (0) 1794 518 433
Mike Jackson

Devon, Cornwall &
The South West
+44 (0) 1872 250 170
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